BUCCANEERS' ISLAND

HENRY R. COOKE

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by

H. R. Cooke.

"It was broad daylight now, and the schooner was hove to as the boats came alongside." Page 68

BUCCANEERS' ISLAND] [*Frontispiece*

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By

Henry Robswood Cooke

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Oh, my name is Captain Kidd
As I sailed,
My name is Captain Kidd,
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As I sailed.

Old Buccaneer Song.

Buccaneers' Island

CHAPTER I

TELLS OF THE SCHOONER "GOOD HOPE" AND HOW WE SAILED TO THE INDIES

HAVING promised these lads of mine to try and set forth, in such fashion as an unlearned sailorman may, all the story of the buccaneers, the schooner, and how they took the Spanish treasure ship in her, and all that happened after we were marooned and the schooner cast away on the island, I sit here with fair white paper by the fathom, quills, and ink, wondering how to get under weigh.

It is not that memory fails, and he who tells a tale to lads by word of mouth must, if he value his good name, tell it the same word for word on paper; no, I reckon the events of that spell of my life will stand by in my dreams though I live twice threescore and ten, but when I try to call them to mind in orderly fashion they tumble up

with a rush like the watch below when some iron-fisted mate bangs upon the scuttle and roars: "All hands on deck, all hands!"

Everything must have a beginning though, so the beginning of this tale is set at that morning of the summer time in the year of grace 17— when Hamish Rhua and I sat dangling our legs over the sea-bank at the Longman Beach waiting for the tide to ebb, and saw the schooner coming up the Firth by Campbellton of Ardersier.

"Yon's no the 'Good Hope,'" said Hamish. "What would she be doing here? It's that old sieve o' Macdonal's, 'The Reaper,' wi' coal from Sunderland!"

"Give me the spy-glass again," said I when the schooner drew abreast of Avoch, and taking another long stare, I made out the familiar white-and-black-chequered sides of the "Good Hope."

"Look now," I said, giving Hamish the spy-glass, "and say it's 'The Reaper.'"

"It's the 'Good Hope' richt enough," said he. "I wonder what's up wi' Paterson!"

Now, there was no ship that sailed in or out the Inverness Firth that held such interest for me as this same schooner "Good Hope," for had not her captain promised that when I was sixteen I should sail with him to the Indies as his clerk, and now my birthday had come and gone?

I had said good-bye to schooldays—being able to write a fair round hand and nimble at figures—and was counting the days when that promise would be made good.

So we sat watching and wondering what she was putting in for, instead of being far away on her voyage to the West Indies.

As she came scudding by the Beacon we could make out the crew standing by to go about for Kessock, and the captain himself at the tiller, even Fido, his black spaniel, racing about the poop and leaping up every minute to stare and bark at the land over the rail.

The schooner went about at the mouth of the river, the crew began to take in sail, and as she came to anchor a puff of woolly smoke burst from her side and the dull report of a carronade came over the sea, whereby we knew all was well aboard, for that was ever the captain's greeting and signal on coming home.

"Oh, Lord, look at the gulls!" cried Hamish, kicking off his shoes. "Come on, man, or we'll lose the fish!"

Hamish Rhua,* so called from his fiery red hair, was my companion, accomplice, fellow-conspirator, and bosom friend in all the fishing, bird-nesting, ferreting, and mischief that lads

* Red James.

are up to, and we had come down that morning, little thinking of the "Good Hope," to watch a line we had set by the Beacon the night before.

The tide goes back very swift for half a mile so shoal is the Longman Beach, and whoever sets a line along there had better watch the ebb closely, or it's little fish for breakfast the kittiwakes and black-backs will leave on the hooks.

We had been watching the schooner so eagerly that we forgot all about the gulls or the tide, and now the line was bare and the birds wheeling and screaming and swooping over it in hundreds. But I was thinking of other things than cuddies and flukes, so, "Hang the fish!" said I. "I'm off to see what's the matter; you gather them." And away I pelted across the fields, past the woodie, and up the Longman Road, reaching home hot and breathless, in time to meet Fido, who came barking and leaping to lick my face, and see Captain Paterson, master mariner and owner of the West India trading schooner "Good Hope," getting off the coach at the corner of the road.

Very stout and very broad was the captain in a wide-skirted blue coat decked with twinkling steel buttons, baggy breeches of the same cloth,

and a yellow waistcoat with great flapped pockets, all much stained with grease and sea-water. Stout woollen hose and broad buckled shoes completed his dress, along with the cocked hat he carried in one hand and the white neckerchief he had untied and was using to wipe the perspiration from his jolly red face. His voice was hoarse with shouting through gales, and he roared at folks in ordinary conversation as if half a mile of raging sea lay between.

"All aboard for Port Royal, Ned, my lad!" he bellowed, jerking our garden gate open and coming along the path in a violent hurry.

"Had to put Wilkes ashore, sick, at Leith, so ye'll sail wi' me a v'yage sooner than we bargained for. Where's your mother—in the house? Aye, aye, then you take a short cruise as far as the bridge and back, d'ye see, while I go in and talk it over wi' the wimmen folk; they'll want persuading, like they always do."

He bustled into the house, but instead of taking a walk, I hung about the garden bushes all a-quiver with excitement, and heard him explaining to mother and sister in a series of mild roars that it was no use in talking, would they stand in the lad's way? "Come now," he was saying, "it's a case o' Ned coming wi' me or the schooner lying up for a week, maybe two,

till I get a man from the south, and that means sheer ruination wi' freights what they are !

" Besides, this summer v'yage to the West Indies and back is no more than pleasure cruising ; back he'll come in a month or two chock a block full o' health and experience ! " And so he talked while they feebly protested until he had gained his point, when he rapped on the window and called me in.

" Everything is all shipshape, Ned, so ye'll bustle and get your chest stowed. The tide will turn about eight bells in the afternoon, and I'll sail with the ebb. And now to sister Betty, and after that some business at the banker's to see after !

" But not later than eight bells, mind ye ! " he called, passing through the garden to his own house, where he lived—being a bachelor—with his sister Betty who kept house for him.

Such a hurry as there was now it was all settled, packing my clothes away and getting all ready, that when dinner was over it was two of the clock and time to harness the pony and be off.

So the pony and cart were brought round to the gate, and away we drove—mother, Peggie, Miss Betty, and I—across the Black Bridge and through the Merk Inch to Kessock Ferry Inn,

where the captain sat with some old cronies over a parting glass of grog, waiting for his boat and the turn of the tide.

"That's the style, Ned. Punctuality, my lad, punctuality," roared the captain.

"Now then, mistress," he said, taking mother by the arm and sinking his voice to a kind of muffled thunder. "Cheer up! anybody would think to see that doleful face we were setting sail for the South Pole in a Kessock ferry-boat, instead of a summer v'yage to Port Royal, Jamaica, in the smartest and staunchest schooner in the trade, by Jove!

"Bear a hand with this chest!" he cried to the seamen, as the boat came alongside the jetty. "Now then, Mistress Rawlings, good-bye, old friend; never fear, I'll bring him back fit to wrastle a bull, by Jove! Good-bye, Peggie; give us a kiss, Betty lass. Now, Ned, it's about high water."

Hugging mother and Peggie good-bye, with a big lump in my throat—for it was the first time we had ever said good-bye—and with many a promise to take care of myself, I took my seat beside Captain Paterson in the boat.

"Shove off!" he cried. "So long, all!" and with a flourish of his hat we pulled away for the schooner.

"Always bustle the wimmen folks when you are saying good-bye to 'em," said the jovial captain. "That's my plan; if ye hang in the wind wi' 'em they get the pumps a-going!

"Not but what I'm generally in the downs myself, lad, when I leave home.

"Hang me!" said he, with a glint in his eye as he looked wistfully astern at the white cottages and the little group standing on the old stone pier, "but it's high time an old dog like me was laying up in dock for good. I will, too, another couple o' v'yages, and I'll stay at home wi' Betty an' grow cabbages, an' sail no more!"

In a few moments we were alongside, and as soon as the captain gained the deck he shouted a perfect hurricane of orders, and the schooner soon began to slip downstream. Presently the tide—which runs by Kessock like a mill-race—caught her, and we swept along past Craigton.

We waved a final farewell to the folks who had walked to the end of the sea-bank to watch us sail by.

Swift past Kilmuir and Munlochy the tide bore us. We looked our last at old Turlie Point and the woods that slope up from the sea to Culloden, where so many gallant hearts were stilled in death a dozen years ago.

Past Chanonry and Ardersier—the fort where

you see the redcoats' bayonets flicker and glint on the ramparts as you go by was not built then—and so out to the open sea.

The land closed up astern, the broad stretch of the Moray Firth lay before us, and the long voyage had begun.

Cheerily the men squared away for the fair wind, coiled down, and went to supper. Broad day gave place to the soft northern twilight; one by one the stars began to glimmer in the darkening sky. No shadow of bloody tragedy and horror lay over the doomed crew as the good ship boomed along through the night over the pleasant summer sea.

CHAPTER II

WHAT BEFELL AT PORT ROYAL

We sailed the North-about Passage through the Pentland Firth, and after weathering the Butt of Lewis, fair winds and strong carried us day after day across the Atlantic.

"Never was such a passage, old girl," the captain would say fifty times in a watch, as he paced about his tiny poop, marking the broad wake streaming astern, now glancing aloft at the swelling sails or along the deck under the foot of the foresail, and patting the rail as if his schooner was a living thing. And well might he be proud of her, for the "Good Hope" was no dingy coasting waggon manned by five men and a boy, counting the cook, but smart and well found from jibboom-end to taffrail, and from main truck to keelson, as sound timber, clean paint, and good gear, and loving care could make her. Decks you could eat food off, gear coiled trim and tidy, about every belaying-pin, brasswork the captain could shave in, and twelve seamen

there were of the best to jump when the skipper roared :

" Fore yard there ; gimme a small pull, boys. Well, the fore yard. Slack a small piece the to'gallant yard, so, belay at that, and well, all."

Then he would ask the schooner if she felt any the better for that.

As for myself, the bounding glory of the sea was in my blood, and I spent the days watching the great foam-laced blue seas chasing us, while Fido sat on the cabin skylight snapping and barking at the gulls that bore us company.

I'm so sick at times to think of that fine ship's crew, all dead at the bottom of the sea by the hands of those devils, and the poor schooner's bones battered to splinters on the island, that I feel like calling back my promise, tearing up these sheets of paper, and keeping the dreadful story to myself.

. . . . . .

We put into Barbados for fresh water, which was the only break in the voyage until we sailed under the frowning guns of Fort Augusta and dropped anchor in the evil-smelling harbour of Port Royal, in the island of Jamaica, one morning eight weeks from leaving Kessock Ferry.

Our cargo was consigned to a gentleman by

the name of Maule, the head of the West India branch of a company of Greenock merchants, and from the day we sailed in until we towed out all manner of vexing delays kept cropping up to worry the captain. First of all there was the time lost in discharging the cargo, then came some bother over the shippers not having the home freight ready, and to make matters worse the port was full of privateers beating up recruits with offers of double wages and prize money, so that men were running every day. A score of merchant craft were lying at anchor in the bay ready to sail, and no men to sail them.

But for all the captain's exasperation at the time lost, it put me little about, and I spent the days roaming here and there taking my fill of all the strange sights in the town of Port Royal and the neighbouring country.

Here was all I had ever heard the sailors tell of along the quay at home, and all I had read to Hamish Rhua out of the old book of " Hakluyt's Voyages " that we used to pore over as we lay among the whins above the Longman Beach watching the ships pass up and down the bay.

The strange and wondrous trees and plants loaded with gorgeous flowers and fruit. Birds flitting about the blossoms all aflash like precious stones in the sun, some no bigger than butterflies ;

and then again there were butterflies all the colours of a rainbow and big as sporricks, the swarming, chattering blackamoors, and over all the staring, white, breathless heat. There were taverns all along the wharfs full of seamen from all the ports in the world, where I'd sit cheek-by-jowl with men-o'-war's men, swaggering privateer's men, no better than pirates some of them, and seamen off the merchant craft—a roaring, pig-tailed, ear-ringed company—and listen to many a tale of storm and shipwreck and sea-fights and prize-money. Here was I, Ned Rawlings, sitting alongside mariners who had sailed with all the great captains and had been in grips with the French, the Dutch, and the Dons a score of times. So I would listen to their talk and stare up at their strong brown faces lost in wonder till suddenly I would remember how late it was and make a bolt for the boat in order to get aboard the schooner before Captain Paterson, who spent most of his evenings at the "Good Queen Ann," which tavern was the rendezvous of all the captains in port.

In this fashion two weeks flew swiftly by, and then our cargo came to keep me close and busy aboard the schooner. One afternoon a few days before we were timed to up-anchor and away, I went ashore with the captain; for a serious thing

had happened, and he was in a towering rage. Three of the schooner's crew were missing since the evening before, and "May I never sail home," he swore, "if ever I heard the like of it; the ungrateful swabs, the best found and smartest schooner in the trade, and to serve me a scurvy trick like this!

"Where the Davy Jones I'm to get men to fill their berths I dunno, I'll be hanged if I do; what with the wages these infernal privateers are offering there isn't a man to be got ashore here for love or honest money!

"There's no man o' mine goes ashore here after to-night, mind that; there's two ashore now, Bennett and Ross. Bennett is a married man, so I'm not afraid o' him, but Ross is a fool in drink, and I want ye, Ned, to cut along to 'The Spanish Galleon' and fetch 'em aboard, if ye can, and any other seamen wanting a passage home wi' good wages if ye come across any. I'm going as far as the 'Queen' to see what's o'clock. I must have a couple o' hands if they're only tailors." And away the captain rolled, rumbling curses on all unfaithful sailormen and mopping his face with a kerchief very near as large as a tablecloth.

"The Spanish Galleon" was a large tavern on the quayside where a hundred seamen could

generally be found of an evening, so I walked into the big common drinking-room to look for Bennett. A big seaman was singing "To all you ladies" as I entered, and a company of about forty or fifty more joined in at the end of each verse with a hurricane "Fal, lal, la," and beat out the time on the tables with their heavy drinking mugs.

At the end of the song a roar of bravos, "Bully for you, matey!" and "Here's luck, old ship!" greeted the singer, and spying Bennett and Ross I slipped across the room and sat down beside them.

"Hallo, Ned, wot are you doin' here?" asked Bennett. "Any word o' them three shirkers yet?"

"Not a word," said I. "The skipper sent me down to get you aboard and find out if any men here want a berth; he's raking the town for men!"

"Well, he won't get 'em, and that you may take your oath on. Why, if it warn't that he's a good skipper an' the wife an' young uns at home, I'd sling my hook myself. Wot with the money the privateers is offering, I'd earn more wi' them in a month than I would aboard the 'Good Hope' in a year, and they're snapping up every man they can lay hands on!"

"Well, I'm glad you are not thinking of running," said I.

"No, we're not thinking o' running," said Bennett, with a look at Ross; "if we'd notions that way it's not settin' here you'd find us, we'd be where the others are, I expect, and that's stowed away snug and safe in some longshore crimping ken till the schooner clears."

At this point a hail for Ross came from a company of seamen who were drinking round a table further down the room.

"They're going to have another go at you, matey," whispered Bennett, laying a hand on Ross's arm to keep him in his seat; but Ross had been drinking, I could see, and with a half-drunken laugh he jerked his arm free and lurched across the room. Half a dozen mugs were held out to Ross as he took a seat, and Bennett swore under his breath as he watched him drinking.

"There's some damned game on here, Ned, I'd give a month's pay to get at the bottom of. That big lantern-jawed swine Ross is settin' alongside of, has bin tempting me and him wi' half a year's wages in good gold guineas only to desert the schooner.

"You had better stay here a while, Ned. I'm a-goin' to hang on to Ross an' not lose sight of

him, or we'll be another hand short to-morrow morning."

Bennett went across the room and sat down beside his shipmate, but he didn't appear to be received with a very good grace, and I saw him refuse drink that was offered him. I called a negro serving-man to bring me some Madeira wine and sat quietly looking about and listening to the singing.

In the main the company were a precious hard-looking lot, and, with the exception of a few men-o'-war's men, not exactly the crew one would wish to put to sea with.

One there was—a tall, thin, dark, handsome man dressed in black, with silver-buckled shoes, snowy lace scarf and ruffles, and his hair tied with a ribbon—who seemed out of place in that rough, tarry, pig-tailed company. But what struck me as uncommon was the fact that he seemed to be well known.

He sat apart at a little table, refreshing himself every now and then with a dainty pinch of snuff from a little glittering box he held in a hand white as a lady's. Several times different seamen spoke to him, but always with a good deal of deference, and he hardly turned his head in speaking to them.

A glass of some liquor stood before him, but

he drank little or nothing, and spoke only when spoken to. His eyes were constantly on the move, and once they turned on me, just a flash, and passed on, yet it was a lightning glance that took all in, from hat to shoe buckles, and made me involuntarily squirm in my seat.

In a little while—during a song—I saw him beckon with his finger, and a minute or so later, in the bustle that ensued in calling for more drink at the end of the chorus, a short, squat, limping seaman, with a red kerchief round his head, rose and approached him.

Some words passed between them, then he of the red kerchief stooped and whispered in the other's ear, at the same time jerking his thumb over his shoulder towards the side of the room where I sat, and limped out of the room.

A few minutes later this dark man looked across again, and catching my eye smiled and shook his head at me in a very pleasant fashion, so what could I do but smile back to him, and a little to my surprise he came over, and taking a seat beside me said in a very pleasant voice :

" You are interested in this company, I see, and right you are to be so, my lad. So am I, and it would be well if all Britons who love their country and their country's future would be like-

wise, for," said he, with a sweep of his arm at the company, "it is upon the stout hearts and strong arms of these same rough careless sea-dogs it all hangs. I know them well, because I am a sailor for the pleasure I take in being one!"

All this was said in an earnest way that was fine to listen to, and he tapped his little gold snuff mull and offered me a pinch with such a grand manner that, though I mortally detest snuff, I could not help taking one and half sneezing my head off.

"You belong to that little schooner that is sailing for Bristol, do you not?"

"Yes, sir!" I replied. "I am the clerk aboard her."

"Ah, I was told you were; as sweet a little hooker as ever I clapped eyes on, and she can travel by the cut of her, eh?"

"I am not a sailor," I replied, "but I have heard the seamen say there's not a schooner in the West India trade she cannot give four knots in twenty to and win!"

"And a well found little hooker, I'll be bound. She looks as if she had a ship's husband for a skipper."

"The captain is the owner," I told him, "and very proud of her."

"When did you say she sails for Bristol?" he asked, after a slight pause.

Now I remembered I did not say when she sailed, but I answered, saying:

"Well, we were to sail three days from now, but three of the crew deserted two days ago, and that may delay us. Captain Paterson is even now hunting up the town for men. That's what brought me here to-night; but I am told our chances of getting men are precious small owing to the high wages offered by the privateers, so it's likely we shall sail short-handed."

"Come now!" he said, drumming on the table, "here's a singular coincidence, and I believe I can help you to the very men you require!

"Yes," he repeated, as if communing with himself, "I believe I can."

"If you can," I said eagerly, "Captain Paterson will be eternally obliged, I assure you."

"Ah, well," he said, with a smile, "perhaps I will ask him to do me a favour in return, but," he said, rising and laying a white hand on my shoulder, "come out and have a glass of wine with me in the garden; we will talk of it where 'tis more cool and pleasant."

I rose and followed him willing enough, for, truth to tell, I was feeling a trifle sick of the

racket, the heat, and the room was foul with the stink of rum and tobacco smoke; also I was anxious to get the men.

Coming into the garden we sat down to a table, where a negro served a bottle of wine, a dish of fruit, and a paper of rolled tobacco leaves.

Filling out two glasses he told me his name was Captain Jones, and learning mine he took off his wine "To our better acquaintance, Master Rawlings!"

He begged me to light one of the cigarros, as he called them, and lighting another for himself he settled easily in his seat and we began to talk.

It came into my mind ever afterwards I must have told Captain Jones everything almost I knew about myself, the schooner, her captain, and crew. Yet so smooth and gentle was his manner I never suspicioned I was being pumped dry.

There he sat, cool, smiling, dainty, sipping his wine and smoking cigarros, the smoke curling out of his nose—he swallowed the smoke and then blew it through his nostrils—a queer way to smoke, I thought, listening to the slack of my tongue as if it were the finest tale he had ever hearkened to. Putting in a question here and

there, or suggesting something else whenever I flagged, that started me off afresh and made me think I was vastly entertaining him.

Too much tongue was ever my worst failing, and even now I feel my face grow hot at the thought of how completely I was turned inside out.

We had been sitting there over an hour when he said: "Not to detain you, Master Rawlings, perhaps you may wonder why I have asked you so much about the schooner, so I will tell you.

"A man of leisure, cruising is my hobby, and I've been roving about the West Indies in a schooner of my own for the past two years. I sold her in Trinidad a month or so ago, and came on here to attend to some business. Matters have cropped up which render it necessary for me to return to England at once.

"Now a gentleman cannot be too careful in these days, what with the desperadoes that sail in and out the ports, but hearing of the 'Good Hope' sailing to Bristol, and putting to that what you have just told me of her, I shall do myself the pleasure of calling upon Captain Paterson in the morning and ask him to give me a passage.

"In the meantime I should take it as an

especial favour if you would mention this to him to-night, at the same time stating that I shall be quite pleased with whatever accommodation he can give me, and tell him he shall have his own price.

"Also you can say that three of my old crew are here, wishful of a passage home, and if he likes I can get them for him. Stout hearty mariners, Englishmen all. For mark 'ee, Master Ned, I'd have none other aboard with me."

Rising, he said: "And now I must go. I have to thank you, Master Rawlings, for a very pleasant hour, and, if I find Captain Paterson agreeable to ship me to England, shall look forward to spending many more." So, bowing and smiling like a very courtier, he walked away.

I sat for a long time after he had gone thinking of this new acquaintance who, I was sure, would be my shipmate.

Paterson was keen on making money, I knew, and would not refuse to make a little pile of guineas by giving Captain Jones a passage.

Suddenly I awoke from the train of thought I had fallen into to find that day had given place to night, so I went back to the drinking-room to find Ross and Bennett and take them aboard.

"Are you coming aboard, or are ye going to

stay here all night ? " said Bennett, as I came up.

" Wot's the matter with this comp'ny that you're in such a hurry ? " asked a broken-nosed ruffian who sat opposite to Ross and plied him with rum. " Ain't it good enough for ye ?

" Look 'ee here, matey ! " said he, striking the table a blow with his fist that made the drinking cups dance, " wot the nation d'ye mean by keeping on shoving your oar in here ? We're all sociable and jolly, meanin' to make a night of it, you see ! "

" Quite right, shipmate ! " said Ross, who was far gone in liquor, " jolly companions every one. Sit down, we'll all report in the morning."

" I see this is a game to get this fool to desert his ship, if not worse, that's wot I see ; an' he comes aboard wi' me now, or I call the watch ! " cried Bennett, in a loud angry voice.

" My advice to you, mate, is to sheer off while your head is whole ! " said the ruffian, half rising from his seat and a menacing frown on his rum-flushed countenance.

There was the makings of a pretty quarrel in this, indeed, matters were beginning to look ugly all round, as, hearing the raised voices, other seamen in the room—half-seas-over and ripe for mischief—crowded round, and while some began

to jostle Bennett, one or two who seemed to be men-o'-war's men sided with him. Seeing these last were few against many I caught hold of Bennett's arm and asked him to come along and bother no more about Ross.

But it was too late. Even as I spoke to Bennett I heard a scuffle behind me followed by an oath and a blow, and in a moment belts and fists were going, and a score of men were at one another's throats. A rush whirled me away from Bennett; I stood for a moment watching the efforts of a tall, spare man, but very broad at the shoulders, who, with his back to me, was trying hard to separate two seamen; at the same time I wondered which would be best to do, get under one of the tables or make a bolt for the door. Before I could decide one way or another I saw a villainous cut-throat with a naked gully in his hand rushing upon this tall seaman.

On the impulse of the moment I gave the tall man a push, and catching up a pewter measure dashed it, drink and all, in the face of his assailant.

It staggered and blinded him for a moment, and before he could recover a fearful blow from the tall man's fist stretched him senseless on the floor.

A moment later the big hurricane lamp that

dangled from a beam in the low ceiling was dashed to the floor, leaving the room in total darkness.

A powerful hand grasped my arm and dragged me across the room.

Through a side door I was hauled and down a narrow passage, and almost before I realised what had happened, I found myself in the dark shadow of the houses fronting the harbour, and saw the lights of the shipping twinkling on the water. Then my captor released me.

"We're well out o' that rumpus, my son!" said he, drawing his breath, "and I owe you one for the smart way you jerked the glass in his ugly mug; another brace o' seconds, and the swab would have knifed me!"

It was too dark to see my friend's face, but the voice was that of a Lowland Scot. His next words confirmed it.

"John Anderson's my name, an' he disna forget favours o' that sort, and maybe, laddie, I'll pay ye back one day!

"Now ye'll just make yersel' scarce; the red coats 'ill be doon directly, grabbing everybody they can lay hands on, and it won't be healthy for them that's caught, particlerly some o' us. It's as much as my own neck is worth if I'm nabbed in Port Royal, so here's off!" And giving

On the impulse of the moment I gave the tall man a push and, catching up a pewter measure, dashed it, drink and all, in the face of his assailant (*page* 35)

me a squeeze of a powerful bony fist he stepped farther back into the shadow of the buildings and disappeared.

I stood still for a little listening to the uproar in the tavern, and wondering how I should get hold of Ross and Bennett.

Evidently the friendly seaman had got me out by some back entry, for the sounds came from the street on the other side of the buildings.

Then I heard a stentorian shout of "Scatter, you lubbers, here comes the patrol!" There followed a great clatter of shoes on the rough cobble stones that rapidly died away, then came the quick regular tramp of soldiers, and having no wish to spend the night in a stinking guard-house, I stole quietly along the quay in the shadow of the houses to where our dinghy was moored and found Bennett sitting in it.

"Where's Ross?" said I.

"Lord only knows!" he replied. "I'm glad you've come at any rate, Ned; I wouldn't take a month's wage and face the skipper without ye. I was wondering where the blazes you could have got to. As for Ross," he said, casting the dinghy loose, "he's where the others are, I reckon. I'm lucky to be where I am. This comes o' trying to get him away," and Bennett pointed to a bloody bandage round his head.

We were both pleased to find the captain still ashore, thinking we had trouble enough for one night, and I turned into bed with a lively sense of satisfaction at getting out of the rumpus without a hole in my skin.

CHAPTER III

HOW WE SAILED FROM PORT ROYAL

At breakfast next morning I could see the captain knew about Ross, for he looked black as thunder, so I avoided the name of Ross and told him of Captain Jones, and how he talked, and what a great gentleman he was. And finished up with the message he had asked me to deliver and his offer to pay any price Paterson might put on the service, and the hint that Captain Jones could get him hands to fill the berths of the missing men.

Captain Paterson listened while I rattled on, wagging his head and growling, but I could see he was interested when I mentioned men and passage money. When I finished he remarked that it was a devilish queer place and company for a gentleman and a man of means to spend his time in. "But maybe he is a bit queer in his maintop, and fond of poking about places like that. I've met men before now with similar notions! What time d'ye say he's coming off,

noon, eh? Well, I'm going ashore to the office. Maule knows pretty well all that goes on in Port Royal, and who's who, so I'll hear what he's got to say about him."

When the captain came back from the office I asked if he had heard anything about Jones.

"Yes," said the captain, "not a great deal, but Maule knows him through some business transactions, and says he has lots of money, and a great swell."

About noon I spied a boat making for the schooner, and as it drew near Captain Jones could be seen sitting in the stern-sheets steering.

"Here comes your passenger, Captain Paterson!" I cried, pointing out the boat.

In a few minutes the boat came alongside; a seaman caught the painter and made fast, while Captain Jones dropped lightly on deck.

"Good morning, Rawlings. Your servant, Captain Paterson!" said he, bowing to the captain as I introduced him.

"I hope, sir, this young gentleman has represented my desire in a favourable light. My mind is set upon sailing to England in your beautiful little schooner, and I shall be terribly disappointed if you do not take me!"

"Well, it's this way, sir!" said Paterson. "I'm not built for passengers, but step down

into the cabin, have a look at it, and if you find things will suit, I don't see that I have any objections to you sailing with us!

"There's not much in the way of room here," continued the captain, as he led the way down the companion and showed Jones the cosy tiny cabin and three little state-rooms. "You see things plain, but such as it is it's clean and tidy, an' there you are, sir!"

Captain Jones professed himself charmed with the little cabin.

"I'd rather have this snug little berth than the admiral's cabin aboard a hundred-gun line-of-battle ship!" said he. "And thinking from what Rawlings said last night that you would be agreeable, I have taken the liberty to bring my passage money with me."

So saying, he laid a heavy netted purse full of gold pieces on the table.

"You will find sixty guineas there, sir," said he; "say if that is sufficent."

"Why, God bless my soul!" cried Paterson, "I couldn't take all that money, sir; it's a great deal more than I could think o' charging ye, why——"

"There! there!" said Jones, waving his hand pleasantly, "I am perfectly satisfied, and sure I shall extract sixty guineas' worth of pleasure

out of the voyage, so I beg you will say no more on that head!"

So it was settled that Captain Jones was to sail as passenger on the schooner "Good Hope," and the bargain sealed in a bottle of Paterson's state-occasion sherry, and they took snuff together out of the little gold box.

"There's another matter!" said Jones, sipping his wine. "I hear the desertion of some men has left you in a difficulty?"

"It has that, the infernal rascals, the deuce and all of a fix!" cried Paterson, flaring up at once, and mopping his forehead. "First men o' mine that ever run since I been captain o' my own ship, and no seamen afloat are better treated than aboard this schooner; and here I've searched Port Royal from stem to stern and never a ship's boy can I get—much less four seamen—for love or money."

Said Jones: "As I told Master Rawlings, I know of three men, men who have sailed with me for two years, Englishmen all, and better seamen never sailed; say the word and I'll get 'em for you! I have a pretty good idea where they are to be found at this very minute, and I'll tell you what, Captain Paterson—immediately I go ashore I'll hunt them up and send them off."

Paterson assured Jones of his gratitude if he could serve him with the men, and, drinking another glass of wine to a quick and pleasant passage, Jones shook hands very cordially, saying, as we came on deck :

"I have a few business matters to attend to before leaving, and if I get those men I'll send them off with my baggage, and be aboard myself to-morrow night. So until then good-bye ! "

" Very good ! " cried Paterson, as Jones dropped into his seat ; " there will be nothing to prevent us sailing first thing on Thursday morning ! "

" You may expect the men with my gear in about two hours ! " cried Jones, as the boat pulled away.

" Right you are, sir ! " roared Paterson, with a flourish of his hand.

" Well, Ned," said he, after we had watched the boat to the jetty and seen Jones disappear in the crowd, " our passenger seems to be a fine, upstanding, outspoken gentleman, and a regular nabob, begad ! Sixty guineas, eh ; gad, I'd a thought myself well paid at half the price ! " and the old boy rubbed his hands and rumbled and chuckled.

" Who the deuce can he be, now, I wonder ? Some big gun, I'll lay a guinea, a bit eccentric,

likes knocking about the world and all that sort of thing !

" I could do with a sixty-guinea passenger like that every trip, begad ! A few v'yages like this and I'll lay up in dock and give some of the young uns a chance." And the old boy rolled down to his cabin, chuckling and wagging his head in great glee.

Sure enough, in something like two hours' time a boat came alongside, and on going on deck, who should be touching their foreheads but he of the red kerchief and two other men I recognised as having been of the company in the Ship Tavern the night before.

" Come aboard, sir ! " said Red Kerchief. " Sent by Cap'n Jones, sir ! "

" Very well, my lads, pass up his traps and get your own dunnage aboard ; I'll want ye to turn to right away ! "

There was nothing out of the way in the appearance of the other two, but Red Kerchief was a remarkable-looking seaman.

His limp was caused by one leg being shorter than the other, but it in no way interfered with him moving about with extraordinary activity, and there was something repellent and goblin-like in the squat figure and the brown, ugly, thin-lipped face, distended all the time in a cunning,

sneering grin, that sent a feeling through me that something was wrong, especially when I remembered his familiarity with Jones in the tavern. But now there was an additional bustle aboard the schooner as the last of the casks of rum and molasses were hoisted aboard that took up my attention, and the suspicion was lulled in the work of checking the cargo and making out the vouchers.

So the busy work went merrily forward, and the new men set about their work like capable mariners, which, indeed, they were.

The captain sent me ashore to buy a few additional dainties for the larder in honour of our passenger, but nobody was allowed ashore after that, Paterson saying too much liberty was bad for discipline, and that some people he knew of were developing a questionable taste for passing their time away in low grog-shops.

Everything was cleared away, hatches were battened down, tarpaulin covers laced, and the schooner ready for sea the following night. The pilot came aboard, and we were only waiting for Jones to come, when we should up-anchor and drop down with the tide.

He came aboard shortly before midnight, and an hour later the capstan bars were shipped, the

anchor hove, and under jibs and topsail we began to slide past Fort Augusta.

The sun leaped the rim of the sea and the sunrise gun boomed out as we swung by Gallow's Point, where the corpses of half a dozen pirates dangled in chains.

The "Good Hope" was beginning to dip and curtsey to the heave of the broad Caribbean. The pilot drank his glass of grog, bade us good-bye, and dropped into his boat towing alongside.

By noon, so fair was the good breeze, the hills behind Port Royal had sunk into the broad blue astern, and we were bowling gaily along with never a suspicion of the dread fate hanging over us, and reckoning the days when we should be home again.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT HAPPENED ABOARD THE SCHOONER "GOOD HOPE"

I HAD forgot to write down that reckoning Captain Jones and the three new men—Red Kerchief, whose name was Richards, Davis, and Becke—all hands aboard the schooner mustered fifteen, and this night—the first at sea—we were reduced to thirteen by a lamentable accident which threw the whole ship's company into a state of consternation.

After sunset it came on to blow pretty stiff, and about two bells of the second watch—which would be an hour after midnight, as landsmen reckon time—the captain ordered the top-gallant sail to be stowed.

Four men jumped aloft—two of the new hands, Richards and Becke, with Bartlett and Pengelly.

A scud was driving across the sky, shutting out the starlight and making the night pitch dark.

Late as it was, I stood by the taffrail—with no thought of turning in—watching the cold white gleam of the foam-tipped waves as they raced astern, when a yell came from the top-gallant yard.

"What the deuce are you up to, man?" shouted Paterson to the other new man, Davis, who was at the tiller, as the schooner gave a tremendous pitch to leeward.

There came another heard-rending cry from aloft—I just caught sight of a dark mass splash into the sea to leeward, and a moment afterwards came a dull heavy thud on the deck, somewhere about the foremast.

"In the name of the Almighty, what's gone wrong there forrard?" roared the captain. There was a rush of feet on the deck and a shout from the mate, saying:

"Here's Pengelly fell from aloft, and I believe there's another hand fell off the yard into the sea to looward, sir!"

"Is the man dead?" cried Paterson.

"Aye, sir, dead as Pharaoh," was the answer. "There ain't a whole bone in him!"

The captain hurried forward, at the same time hailing the men left on the topgallant yard.

"How many of ye are aloft there? Up, a couple of men, and see what's the matter!"

"That lurch sent Pengelly and Bartlett off the yard!" called a voice from the foretop.

There was a rattle of descending feet on the shrouds, and in a minute Richards and Becke regained the deck, looking ghastly white under the tan on their faces, in the fitful light of the hurricane lamp.

It was useless to think of saving Bartlett, for by this time he was at the bottom of the sea half a mile astern.

"They were both flung off when she pitched that time," explained Richards to the circle of men that gathered round, "and I was as near as a touch off myself."

"Same 'ere," says Becke; "just managed to hang on by my eyebrows. That lubberly swab ought to be keelhauled," and he shook his fist savagely at the helmsman.

There was nothing to be done, so the body of poor Pengelly was laid out on the main hatch and covered up. The captain went aft and sent Davis away in disgrace, rating him ship's boy for the rest of the voyage.

No one thought of going to bed that night; the hands gathered under the lee of the deck-house, talking in low mutterings of

the catastrophe, and I heard Richards explaining that he was "on the weather yard-arm, mates":

"And strike me blind if it wasn't the nearest squeak I ever had."

The captain was in a terrible way about his two men. They had sailed with him for several years, and the schooner had a name for being free of accidents; but Jones took his arm as they walked the poop together, and did all a man could to console and sympathise with him in his misfortune.

The body of the dead seaman was sewn up in his hammock, two heavy shot tied to the heels, and in the early morning was laid on a plank and covered with a flag.

The crew was mustered, and while we all stood reverently by, the captain stood at the head of the plank, and in a voice broken with emotion read the sea burial service. At a sign from the mate the watching seamen uptilted the plank and the poor body went to its long resting-place with a sullen plunge.

. . . . . .

The sun rose, the wind lessened a good deal, the hot brilliant sunshine and the sweet strong

sea breeze seemed to chase away the gloom that rested on the ship.

Breakfast was piped, and save that the men went about their work in silence, or spoke in low tones, the routine of the ship went forward as usual.

We were looking up for the windward passage, which lies between Cuba and Hispaniola, and a bright look-out was kept, for in those narrow seas a strange sail was something to be wary of.

The Spanish Main swarmed with all sorts of privateers and gentlemen of fortune flying the Jolly Roger. The sweepings and scourings of all the ports and seas in the world, and the most desperate and cruel of these gentry were Englishmen, it was said.

A rumour of Parry or England or Davis or Teach being in the neighbourhood was sufficient to keep a merchantman lying idly in port until such time as a convoy was formed and they could sail in company with men-o'-war until they cleared the narrow seas and gained the broad Atlantic.

These gentry had spies in every port in the Indies, and was there a ship leaving or expected with a valuable cargo, they knew, and God help that ship if it was unlucky enough to be caught.

More often than not they were never heard of again.

It was said of Parry that he never spared the life of a soul on board any ship that resisted him.

Teach was a raving maniac when his blood was up, with lighted gun-matches smouldering and sticking out from under his hat, and his great beard tricked out with ribbons. Some called him Blackbeard.

I had listened to a score of tales in Port Royal of Teach and Parry. Of Teach with six pistols in his belt and his mad ferocity to his own men.

He had to shoot a man every now and then else they would forget he was captain, was what he said on one occasion when he blew the light out and fired his pistols off in the dark, killing one man and disabling another.

Thank God he was dead, and I saw his head, all black with the sun, on a spike above the main gate at Fort Augusta.

Stories of Parry's devilish cruelty and how he would pace the deck in a fight all scented and dressed in silk and lace ruffles, a pistol in either hand, and blow the brains out of any man he caught shirking his gun; of tall ships plundered and scuttled, and poor mariners and delicate

ladies marooned on desert islands, lucky to escape with their lives.

I could fill a book with the tales I had heard, and you may be sure there was no fancy among us to fall in with these gentry—but to my tale.

On the night of the third day after leaving Port Royal there occurred on board the schooner "Good Hope" an affair so mysterious and terrible that for a while—coming as it did on the heels of the death of Bartlett and Pengelly—threw the whole ship's company into a panic, and came near causing a mutiny.

When the morning watch came on deck it was found that McLaren and Stowe, two seamen belonging to Kessock, were a missing.

Every hole and corner of the ship where a rat could hide was searched, but never a sign of the missing men. The watch was questioned, but nobody knew. The mate, whose watch they were in, had spoken to McLaren about five bells, and Beeke said he saw Stowe about the same time leaning against the weather bulwarks by the main shrouds while he—Beeke—was at the tiller. The whole dread business was shrouded in mystery. Here were two fine hearty seamen alive and well, an hour later they had utterly vanished.

Of course the men were overboard, but it seemed incredible that two experienced seamen should fall overboard, more especially as the night was fine, with no more than the ordinary heave of the sea in a fair breeze. Never a sound had been heard, although a cry might have been drowned in the grinding smash of a sea against the schooner's bows. Low growls about some damned "Jonah" being aboard were heard among the men, and dark looks were cast at Jones, who was again doing his utmost to console Captain Paterson.

Most of the crew had been with the captain for years. McLaren and Stowe were from Kessock, and he was utterly cast down by this second calamity.

Had Richards and Davis been on deck I should have suspected them—for a dark suspicion of foul play got about and men began to look askance at one another—but both of them were in the other watch and apparently asleep in their hammocks when it occurred.

. . . . . .

That night I was destined to be the witness of as bloody and cruel a piece of treachery as ever fiends in the shape of men could be guilty of,

and to this day I am sick at heart to think that had I not been the most thick-headed young lubber that ever walked a ship's deck I maybe could have averted it.

First of all, about the middle of the first night watch—which would be ten o'clock by shore reckoning—I was leaning against the lee rail close by the break of the poop, and in the shadow of the mainsail, thinking sadly of the four good seamen we had lost, and vaguely wondering what dark mystery it was that overhung their fate, when I overheard some one on the deck immediately below softly whistle a few notes of a sea ditty.

In a little while a man came aft and began coiling down some ropes about the belaying-pins under the main lee rigging.

"Is that you, Richards?" said a soft, guarded voice, which to my surprise I recognised as that of Captain Jones.

"Aye, aye, sir!" answered Richards, in the same low tone.

He never raised his head, but went on with the work he had.

Jones I couldn't see, for he stood in the dark shadow of the poop. Now what the deuce could he be whispering to a common seaman for, I

wondered, even though they had sailed together?

His next question surprised me still more.

"Are you all ready?" he asked.

"Any minute you like, sir," said Richards, still fiddling about the belaying pins.

"Then," said Jones, "look out for my signal. We may see their light any minute now, and see that it is done swiftly and silently."

What was he to signal for? Whose light were they to see? What was the work to be done swiftly and silently?

I felt in the marrow of me that some terrible business was afloat, and was minded to slip down and tell the captain what I had overheard. But Jones's step on the poop ladder kept me still.

He crossed the deck and disappeared down the companion, and after standing for a moment unable to make up my mind what to do, I followed him into the cabin.

Here I found he had just proposed a game of picquet to Captain Paterson by way of taking his mind off the gloomy state of affairs on the ship, and with that purpose they were settling themselves at the table and cutting the cards for deal when I entered.

Captain Paterson laid his cards down and stooped in his seat to look under the table (*page* 58)

"Hallo, Master Ned," said Jones, turning a surprised look on me, "I didn't know you were on deck."

"Yes," said I, "I have been on the poop, leaning over the lee rail for the last half-hour."

"Oh, you have, have you?" he said, smiling and darting a piercing glance as if he would read what was passing in my brain.

"You to play, Captain Paterson, I think," he went on, looking over his hand.

I watched him narrowly all this time, but oh, he was the smooth deep devil and a match in cunning for a score of boys.

He laid down his cards and fell to feeling and slapping all his pockets.

"Deuce take it!" he said, "if I haven't left my snuff-box on the chicken coop under the poop where I was sitting a few moments ago. Would you mind fetching it, Ned?"

Not very willing I ran up, and not finding the snuff mull anywhere went back to tell him, looking through the cabin skylight as I came to the head of the companion ladder.

Jones was leaning forward and saying something to the captain—that he had dropped a card, it seemed.

Captain Paterson laid his cards down and stooped in his seat to look under the table.

As he did so, Jones rose softly, and whipping a long knife out of his pocket leaned over, and quick as a flash buried it to the hilt in the captain's neck.

CHAPTER V

CAPTAIN PARRY

Sick with horror, I saw Captain Paterson sink in a huddled heap under the table, and a moment later his murderer, dagger in hand, bounded on deck. Raising a whistle to his mouth he blew a long piercing call that cut the air like a knife, and turning with a spring like a tiger was on the man at the tiller. An Inverness man he was named Bonner.

The bloody weapon glinted in the starlight, and before the poor fellow realised his danger, or could raise a hand to defend himself, he sank coughing to the deck, stabbed to the heart.

And now came the noise of a deadly fight in the fore part of the schooner, shot after shot rang out amid oaths and startled yells of anger and surprise, that were cut short in a hideous manner.

I had dropped down in the shadow of the cabin skylight, my heart thumping against my

ribs and wondering when my turn was coming, for I felt I was very near death at that moment.

Jones had seized the tiller to steady the schooner, which had begun to fall off in the wind, and seeing an opportunity I crawled towards the starboard poop ladder, and keeping the skylight between him and I, somehow managed to reach the ladder and get down to the main deck without being seen or heard.

All was quiet now about the fo'c'sle, and creeping into the dark shadow of the poop I lay shivering in deadly fear, for in my heart I knew all were dead of the crew except Jones and his men.

"What goes forrard there?" he shouted, high and fierce.

"All serene!" came the answering hail.

Bare feet pattered along the deck, and Richards, Davis, and Becke sprang up the ladder; all three had pistols and knives in their hands, and they panted heavily as they ran past.

"Is that that swine Bonner?" Davis shouted. "I wanted to cook his goose myself!"

"Where's the old dog, and the pup?" cried Richards.

"I've settled the captain!" said Jones; "never mind Rawlings, I'll find use for him later on. Heave this carrion overboard; you will

find the late captain in the cabin—over with him too ! "

A heavy splash in the sea told me that Bonner was gone, and later I heard them panting and cursing frightfully as they dragged the heavy body of the murdered captain on deck, and a second plunge was the last of the poor, old, bluff, jovial captain.

" Forrard now with you, and clear the decks there. I'll attend to the ship," was the next order.

A thousand thoughts flashed across my brain, lying there in the dark hardly daring to breathe; all the incidents since I met Jones came back to memory with a new meaning, and the whole terrible affair was plain to the dullest wits.

The seizure of the schooner had been carefully planned and bloodily carried out—by whom I was soon to learn.

" Can you make out anything from forrard there, Becke ? " shouted Jones.

" I ain't quite certain, sir ! " answered Becke. " I thought I caught sight o' the flash of a glim a minute ago. I'll go aloft and have a squint around ! "

" There they are, sure as gun's iron ! " shouted Richards, who had returned to the poop.

" Where away ? " asked Jones.

"See broad abeam there to starboard!" he answered.

"Here, take this tiller, Richards," said Jones.

"Aye, there go the cutters," I heard him say a moment later. "Lay her nose straight for the lights—and Becke!" he shouted, "aloft with ye and give them a wave of a lamp from the foretop!"

In the excitement of the moment, I stood up to look as the schooner altered her course, and under the foot of the foresail could see far ahead the bright light as of a beacon flaring on the sea. Still looking and wondering who was in the cutters—more pirates, of course—I heard the voice of Jones.

"Good morning, Ned. I was just beginning to wonder where the deuce you had got to!"

I wheeled in affright, and looking about found myself standing fully exposed in the bright tropical starlight. I had forgotten—while staring at the light—the altered position of the schooner as her head was laid for it.

Jones was leaning over the rail smiling down on me.

"You have been a long time looking for that snuff-box, Ned; have you found it yet?"

I had watched a cat playing with a mouse before killing it. My throat was dry with terror,

and fascinated, as travellers say a bird is by a snake, I stood speechless, as if rooted to the planks, expecting him every moment to draw and send a bullet through my head.

After looking down on me like that for hours, it seemed, he broke the spell, saying:

"Oblige me by stepping up here!"

Impelled by the cold, cruel voice, I climbed the ladder, never taking my eyes off him, and then poor Fido crawled out of the cabin and lay whimpering at my feet. I think he was dying, and that they must have stabbed him when they were dragging the captain's body out of the cabin, but he snarled and showed his teeth to them.

"Here!" said Jones, "we don't want this dog aboard. Go seek your master," said he, and he stooped, and seizing the dog by the leg he whirled it over the rail.

At that I was nerved to desperation, and, reckless what befell, I cried out:

"Oh, kill me at once and be done, you bloody murderer!"

"Silence, you dog!" said he. "I have no intention of killing you, at least not yet awhile. I have more use for you alive, begad! Now!" he went on, "you are a clean lad, I say that for you although the merest trifle slow and thick

in the head, and possess the devil's own wagger of a tongue. You shall be my valet, begad, and look after my clothes.

"I was vastly entertained by those stories you told me a few nights back there in Port Royal of your grandmother, and grand-aunt, I think you said!" and he stepped back a pace and laughed, a laugh—in which the other blood-stained ruffians joined—long and shrill.

"Most estimable old ladies I thought them, I do assure you. And you are fond of sport; you shall see something noble in that line before you are many weeks older, I promise!

"Shooting, I think you said you were most fond of. Ah!" said he, shaking his head and taking a pinch of snuff out of the very box he had sent me to look for—"Richards here will show you, one of these days, some noble shooting!"

Richards, who was at the tiller, his dark, ugly, evil face spread in a grin, spat into the sea and drew the back of his hand across his mouth in evident enjoyment.

"But he is greedy and ambitious, is our friend Richards!" continued Jones.

"No small game or fowling-pieces for him, he scorns anything like that.

"Nothing but the very biggest game will suit,

and he refuses to shoot out of anything less than a brass nine-pounder.

"He is after big game just now, and we have been to no end of trouble and worry to provide him with this very fine schooner, that his taste may be gratified, and he won't rest until he tries his brand new nine-pounder on the 'Castellan de la Plana.'

"And now, Master Ned!" said he, "I am a trifle short-handed at present, and as we shall be picking up a few gentlemen presently—among them an old acquaintance of yours, John Anderson—would you mind stepping forward to the galley and assisting Mr. Becke to provide something for their entertainment? There's a deal to be done before we can accommodate Richards concerning the 'Castellan de la Plana.'

"We shall all have to work very hard for a time, and I am sure you do not wish to be an idler!"

With that, he made me an ironical bow and, turning on his heel, descended to the cabin, leaving me standing on the deck staring after him, and vaguely wondering if I should not wake presently and find it all a hideous nightmare.

The harsh voice of Richards brought me to my senses.

"If you know what side your toast's buttered on," he croaked, "you'll cut along to the galley, and help Becke get some grub ready against the hands coming aboard. I never knew the cap'n to order twice!" and he nodded his head grimly.

Gathering my wits together I went forrard and began to help Becke to get some pork and a huge pot of chocolate ready.

Becke was a yellow-faced, dark man, and while we busied ourselves he said, looking at me in some wonder:

"Sink me if you ain't got your blessed stars to thank you're alive this blessed minute, blow me.

"I ain't got anything agin ye, an' we've you partly to thank for being afloat again, so I'll give you a piece of advice, young man, as you had better lay to heart!

"Don't you never back answer the cap'n, or get callin' him bloody murderer no more, unless you particklerly wants to die sudden; and when he tells you to do anything, you had better jump, just you mind that.

"Who is he, and who are we?" he cried, with a great laugh—as, finding I was not to die then, I gained courage and put the question to him. "Sink me, don't you know yet? Why wot genel-

man o' fortune afloat could 'ave planned this 'ere lay-out, and carried it clean slap through with never a blooming hitch, d'ye think, but *Cap'n Parry!*

"Who are we? His bully men all, of course. That's Richards at the tiller, he's gunner, 'ere's me, Becke, mate, and two score more wi' old Anderson and Hood in them two cutters out there!" and he pointed through the door at two large boats crammed with men that were rapidly pulling towards us.

CHAPTER VI

PARRY'S MEN COME ABOARD

It was broad daylight now, and the schooner was hove to as the boats came alongside. Men stood up in the bows and flung painters to Davis, who made fast. Then, with a loud huzza, they swarmed on deck.

I stood at the galley door watching them fearfully as they came aboard. As far as could be seen, they were all British seamen, and a strange familiarity about their appearance made me feel pretty certain that here was the same company I had sat among in the "Spanish Galleon" of Port Royal.

A wild, motley crew, dressed in all manner of clothes: some in woollen sea caps, cotton shirts, and wide canvas breeches, some literally in rags, others — the officers, thinks I — decked out in gay laced coats, light breeches, and cocked hats.

Some, old in wickedness, a few, lads of twenty

or thereabouts, but all stamped with an air of reckless, savage daring.

They were armed to a man with every weapon under the sun, I think: muskets, blunderbusses, shot-guns. Some had great brass holster pistols stuck in their belts, cutlasses, dress swords, knives, and outlandish cruel-looking dirks, long and wavy-bladed; one or two of the more ragged ruffians even carried axes.

For a few minutes there was quite a din of shouting and talking as they stood about stretching and rubbing their stiffened limbs, till Parry's voice sounded along the deck:

"Cut that boat adrift, sling the cutter aboard, Becke, and get every stitch set.

"Then let the men have breakfast, and when that's over, pipe all hands aft.

"Pass the word for Anderson to lay aft at once!"

He rapped the orders out sharp and stern, and I could see at once by the way the men took them that the ship was under an iron discipline.

Some sprang aloft, others rigged a tackle to hoist the cutter inboard.

"Here, Hood, take over the galley!" shouted Becke. "That boy'll help, an' tell you where the grub's kept."

A big yellow-haired man came through the crowd to the galley; bareheaded he was, and dressed in a loose shirt and wide seaman's breeches, held round the waist by a broad, leather buckled belt, in which was stuck a sheath-knife; coarse hose and thick buckled shoes completed his dress.

He was so tall and broad he had to stoop to enter the galley, and when he was come in he looked down at me curiously, and smiling as he said:

"So you're the youngster as old Jock 'as bin talkin' about, wot saved his bacon back there in Port Royal a few nights ago!

"Weel, I reckon that turn saved yours!

"Pore little beggar!" said he, patting me with a great hand on the head; "you will have seen some rough times since ye left Port Royal, eh?

"Wiped the lot out, I suppose, they did, didn't they?" he asked, bending over the pot and stirring the contents. "Ah, not ready yet, I see! Did they do for the lot, sonny?" he repeated.

"Every one but me," I said, looking up in his face.

It was a brown, fat, jolly face, not at all the face of a bloodthirsty ruffian, so I made bold

to ask him in the same breath if he were a pirate.

"A pirut!" he said.

"Well, I don't suppose if I was nabbed by a man-o'-war, say, along wi' this crowd o' beauties, they'd let me off on account o' my good looks.

"No; I reckon I'd just dangle on Gallow's Point along wi' the rest o' them. But John an' me, we're wot they call non-combatants, an' maybe we'll tell ye how we come to be among this crush.

"An' now," said he, filling some chocolate into a little pot, "you know the ropes aboard here. Aft wi' ye to the cabin and set the table for cap'n's breakfast, and come back wi' a bread-basket full o' biscuit!"

Observing me hesitate, for I hated the idea of going near the cabin, he slapped me on the back, and kindly said:

"I understand, sonny, but don't you be afeared o' him, he won't hurt ye. Anderson's got you under his wing, an' there ain't a man aboard, not Cap'n Parry's own self, as can afford to cross his bows just now, but don't ye get cutting athwart Parry. Move around lively, do as yer bid, and let him see as yer willin' an' tidy, d'ye see, an' John an' I'll look after ye."

Heartened by these words, I carried the chocolate aft to the cabin and laid out the breakfast for Parry, then I went to the lazarette, filled the bread-basket, and was about to go on deck when Parry come out of his berth.

"Ah!" said he, "one moment, boy, come here!"

Trembling, I laid the basket down and went to him.

"Do you see these clothes of mine?" he said, cool and pleasant as of old.

"Yes, sir!" I replied.

"So, then part of your work while you are aboard the schooner will be to keep them in order and lay out such as I require.

"For the rest of your time, you can help the cook in the galley, and tell Anderson to rig you up a berth in the deckhouse. You may go now!"

And he sat down to eat and pore over a great chart that belonged to Captain Paterson.

I hurried on deck, glad to get away, and helped Hood to serve out breakfast to the crew.

That over, Hood said: "Now John an' you an' I'll have a tuck in here in the galley. I dunno

wot you are, but I'm fit to eat my shoes, buckles an' all!"

Putting his head out he hailed Anderson, and a minute later I was face to face with the man of the "Spanish Galleon." Of all that wild crew, the grimmest figure among them was John Anderson.

I remembered the long, thin, muscular frame, but the face I had never seen until now, and though many men have I met since carrying marks of battle on them, never did I see one with so terribly mutilated a face as this.

In some stern fight a cutlass slash had nearly shorn half away. The right eye was gone and the nose was divided by a cut which extended in a broad white weal from the right brow to the left jaw. Otherwise his face was brown and wrinkled, and the effect was to give the man a most terrifying appearance.

But a closer look altered that impression. One saw a kindly gleam in the steadfast, solitary eye, and it was apparent the face had once been comely and attractive.

"Aye! aye! laddie," he said, in a deep, strong voice, coming into the galley. "I didna think when I left ye that night we'd meet so soon. Puir mannie, ye'll be all that's left o' they

that sailed from Port Royal, barrin' Parry an' his men.

"It canna be helped!" said he, "nothing I could do would ha' saved them, they kept too close a watch on Hood an' me; an', mark ye, Hood," said he, turning to the cook, "there's going to be men laid out afore another watch is called, or the sun isn't shining.

"Harvey and his gang has been carrying on in the cutter, blinding and blasting all along the night fit to sink her."

"That's all right!" said Hood, breaking in, "but I'm hungry, an' here's grub spoilin'. If we don't bear a hand we'll get no breakfast. As for wot's goin' to happen later on, why, there ain't no manner o' good in bidding the devil good morning till ye come alongside him, so here goes!"

Taking Hood's advice we sat down to the pork and biscuit.

"Parry's fit for a shipload o' Harveys, I reckon!" said Hood, with his mouth full of pork. "Though I lay my hat full o' guineas they don't think it!

"An' wot if they do?" he continued, in a low growl; "it would suit us better'n anything I know of if they did start in slittin' each other's weasands!

"There's a cove aboard here, sonny," he said, catching the questioning look on my face, "born swell same as Cap'n Parry, thinks he'd make as good a cap'n as Parry, an' he's got some o' the hands to think that way too—Parry being stiff as a admiral o' the fleet on discipline!"

We finished breakfast without further talk, and it turned out as Hood said, for the meal was hardly over when the hoarse hail of Becke resounded along the deck.

"All hands lay aft!" he bellowed. "All hands, lively now!"

Popping my head out of the galley door, I looked aft and saw Parry standing at the poop rail dressed like a duke, in a green gold-laced coat, a fine feathered cocked hat on his head, black glossy breeches, and white silk hose ending in twinkling silver-buckled shoes, snowy lace tie and ruffles, and from under the coat hung the scabbard of a slim dress sword.

Cool and easy he stood while the crew gathered under the poop, and when Becke announced all present, he closed his snuff-box with a snap, placed it in his pocket, and, resting two white hands on the rail, looked down on us.

Standing close by Hood and Anderson I watched the strange scene curiously enough, nor is it likely I shall ever forget it. The wild-looking

crew waiting on the words of their captain, the schooner's deck clean, trim, as of old, with no sign of the awful work of an hour or two before, and the blue sea all around dashed here and there with snowy wave-crests flashing in the hot tropic sunlight.

"Gentlemen," he began, soft and smooth, as his eyes swept over us, "after a long spell of bad luck, Dame Fortune has smiled again, and we have reason to congratulate ourselves on being afloat again in as clever a little craft as sails the main.

"So far, so good; let us see to it fortune does not desert us through fault of our own.

"Now it is for you here to say whether the old ship's rules are to hold aboard this schooner."

"Aye, aye, every one, an' Cap'n Parry for ever; huzzay for Cap'n Parry!" roared most of the pirates.

"Then, my lads," resumed Parry, flashing a lightning glance at a knot of pirates who clustered about the main weather rigging, and from whom came one or two growls and jeering laughs, "if we are to carry the venture through, we have no time to lose. So pay attention, all hands!

"The 'Castellan de la Plana' will be in the

throat of the Windward Passage about seven days from now, according to my information and reckoning!

"We have to make the rendezvous, discharge a good deal of this cargo, get the powder and the arms aboard, mount the gun, and be there to meet her. So see to it every man does well, or, peradventure, I'll have a word with him. Ye can turn to, and grog will be served as usual, twice daily, while at sea!"

He waved us away and went to pacing to and fro on the poop deck, and I ran below to trim the cabin and put his clothes away while he was on deck.

That kept my hands full till nigh on to eight bells, and after dinner was cleared away I helped Hood in the galley, and as we worked he told me much about the schooner's crew and their intentions.

The "Castellan de la Plana," he said, was a big Spanish barque homeward bound from Trinidad to Cadiz, and besides a rich cargo it was known she carried a big sum of money, and was heavily armed. Parry had contrived by means of spies and bribery to learn all this, besides her date of sailing, and, further, he had got some of his own men shipped as seamen aboard her whose

business it was to let off rockets if it should happen she made the passage in the night.

"An' a precious risky job they've got on hand!" said Hood. "I shouldn't care about being in their skins if they get caught at it!"

"A barque," said I, "and well armed? She's too much for this little schooner to tackle!"

"Don't you believe it, sonny!" he replied.

"When we sail out o' the rendezvous at Tortuga, this schooner will be fit to tackle a man-o'-war, let alone a merchant Don. An' the 'Castellan de la Plana,' as they call her, is Parry's meat.

"There's a crowd aboard here wi' a born devil at the head o' them as ain't afeared o' anything twice their size afloat, so long as there's plunder for 'em to fling away in rum and gambling an' all that!

"They're all aboard here," he said, "all the old 'Dolphins,' 'ceptin', of course, Bishop, an' Knight, an' Hayes, an' Johnson. Them you might 'ave seen jiggin' on nothin' at Gallow's Point as ye sailed by out o' Port Royal.

"They was picked up in the pinnace by a man-o'-war after the old 'Dolphin' foundered off Porto Rico. 'Dolphin' was the name of

their last ship. Her they took the 'Cartagena' in an' many another.

"An', as I was saying, Knight an' the other three was picked up, an' Knight was recognised as one o' Teach's old hands, and they was all swung.

"The Bishop o' England would a bin hung if found sailing in company wi' Knight. A holy terror he were, an' no mistake."

Then Hood told me about the crew.

"There's Richards, gunner he was, gunner wi' Teach, an' has cut more throats than he's got fingers an' toes. Becke, the mate, one o' Robert's old men. Harvey, Duke Harvey they call him, being as big a swell a'most as Parry, but fond o' rum, w'ich Parry ain't, he wos one o' Teach's best men, an' a bould bad devil; he's got his knife out for Parry.

"Then Anderson, I dunno wot he ain't aboard here, he's shipwright, smith, carpenter, armourer, anything ye like at a pinch. Ah, it's a lucky ship as has old Jock along, an' well do they know it!

"An' me, now, wot d'ye suppose is my rating among this 'ere crowd o' genelmen o' fortune?" Hood asked, placing his fists on his hips, his fat shiny face wrinkled up in a grin.

"A.B., of course, I gives you that. Wot else?"

"Why, the cook," I said.

"Right you was, I'm 'Slushy.' Wot else? Come now!" he asked, with a wider grin than ever.

I could not think of anything else he was likely to be, so answered:

"I don't know, I give it up!"

"No!" he grinned, "I'll lay ye don't, an' you wouldn't guess in a thousand o' years. So I'll tell ye.

"D'ye see Cap'n Parry's ties an' shirts an' all them lace fal-lals he rigs himself up in? Well, when at sea, I do 'em up. I'm Cap'n Parry's laundrymaid, sink me fathoms deep if I'm not."

And it was true, as I afterwards found out.

Never was there a lady of quality so fond of dainty finery as was this bloody, callous free-booter. He had a dozen fine suits, and was always changing them. And fresh linen, ruffles, and ties every day, all turned out snowy white as need be by Hood.

Yet this dandy, who took an hour to dress himself, was skilled in all matters that concerned the working of an armed ship at sea, and cunning,

bold, and merciless as a tiger, as he had need be to rule that cut-throat crew.

And having said all this, I come now to what happened on that afternoon. Not that I take any pleasure in telling of these things, for the bloodiness of it all turns me cold and sick at heart even at this length of time.

I tell it to show further what manner of man this Captain Parry was, and the reason for all the fear of him.

There was some fierce grumbling among a number of the pirates at the small allowance of rum served out to them, and though a goodly breeze sped us along, it did not afford much relief, for the wind blew as from a furnace, the touch of metal blistered the skin, the pitch stood in blobs along the deck seams, and once I laid my hand on the shrouds while drawing a bucket of water and it took me a good hour to get the tar off.

The only men who seemed unaffected by the heat were Anderson, who was lean and sundried, and Parry, who, cat-like, revelled in it.

But for all that, Becke and the gunner kept all hands hard at work.

"Is there never a drain of rum to be served out to men sweating like dogs in this hell's heat?" swore Harvey.

"Eh! Wot?" said Richards, wheeling round on the speaker.

"Ho! it's you, Harvey, is it? Shall I run aft an' inform the cap'n as you require rum, an' you'll play up blue blazes if you don't have it. Eh, shall I?"

"Captain Parry go hang!" shouted Harvey, who seemed to be maddened, for his eyes glared, and his face was purple with heat and passion.

"Is this a free ship and free men all, or are we pressed aboard a man-o'-war?" he bawled, looking over his shoulder at the men who gathered round.

Richards answered with a blast of his whistle that brought Parry along, and as he came the gunner limped quickly towards him and whispered in his ear.

All hands, except the man at the tiller, had now gathered in the waist scenting trouble, and the captain strode into the midst of them and confronted Harvey.

"So," he cried, with his arms akimbo, "Harvey, you would have this schooner sailed as Teach sailed his, would ye? Well, his ship ran with rum, I've heard tell, and I *saw* Lieutenant Maynard sail into port with Teach's head dangling from his jibboom end, and two score

of his men swung on Gallow's Point a few days later.

"And you think, do you, you mutinous dog, after all my planning I'll risk this venture by letting you and the hands free of the rum barrels?"

"Have we starved and thirsted this many a day ashore, that now we're afloat and plenty aboard we still go dry?" cried Harvey.

"Harkee, my man," said Parry, "there's the water-butt, don't spare it; but for rum, dry you may be and dry you shall go till I say the word, and that you may take your oath on. If this cruise comes to naught, it won't be through rum.

"Too many seamen have I seen in my time not to know there's not half a dozen in every hundred of ye knows when to clap a tompion in your muzzles. Give you a foot, you'll take a fathom."

"Rum we want, and rum we'll have. What d'ye say, bullies all? Are we babies, to be ruled thus?" roared Harvey, looking round at the men who gathered behind him growling and handling their weapons.

If Harvey had been as quick-witted at that moment as he was bold, it might have gone ill with Parry, for rum was before everything with

these careless ruffians, and all that was wanted was a bold man to lead the attack. But it was here the quick brain and cool nerve of Parry beat him.

"Hold!" he cried, a pistol in either hand. "I'll blow the brains out of the first man that crooks a finger!

"Listen a moment!

"Unworthy though I may be, the gentlemen who form the majority of this crew have done me the honour"—here he swept them a low bow —"to elect me captain. You, Mr. Harvey, think otherwise!"

"Enough of this palaver," growled Harvey. "What's to be done?"

"This!" cried Parry, thrusting his pistols back and whipping his sword out.

"Rum you shall have, Duke Harvey, rum to float in, and you *may* be captain, but first you shall fight for it."

Holding his sword at arm's length, he whirled round on his heels.

"Stand back!" he cried, "and give room there—room and fair play for the new captain!"

The pirates fell back to the bulwarks. Readily enough Harvey stepped into the ring, and in an

instant his blade crashed and grated against the captain's.

For a moment or two the blades writhed up and down as they warily tried each other's strength, when, like a flash, Harvey disengaged and delivered a cut at Parry's head that must have clove him to the shoulder had he not leapt nimbly aside.

Parry returned with a thrust which Harvey swept aside, and then backward and forward they sprang, thrusting, slashing, parrying, and foining for a long ten minutes without either being touched, as bonnie a fight as ever man would wish to see.

But though they were both fine swordsmen, all could see what the end would be, unless Harvey brought the fight to a finish quickly, for while Parry fought coolly, with a devilish smile of confidence, Harvey already breathed heavily, and he pressed with might and main.

Yet strive as he would, the captain held him at every point, stooping now to avoid some fierce cut, deftly parrying that lightning thrust, leaping in and out quick and agile as a panther, and each minute that passed the other grew slower in his attack, his breath came in thick sobs, a hunted look of fear came into his eyes, and the cruel smile deepened on Parry's face.

Now it was that a change came over the fight. It was Harvey's turn to defend himself, and we could see how the captain had been playing with him. For in becoming the assailant Parry was another man. Quick before, the eye could hardly follow his blade now.

A minute of this new sword-play and Harvey was pinked thrice, and bright splotches of blood grew on his shirt. The evil thing about it being that Parry was taking a pleasure torturing the man, when he could have killed him any moment now.

Then the end came with startling suddenness. Harvey sprang aside, and gathering his remaining strength closed on the captain in one last desperate effort to beat him down. Parry slipped on one knee, the wild blow whistled over his head, and I saw a foot of shining steel sticking out between Harvey's shoulder-blades.

"You would have rum, Duke Harvey, and you would be captain!" said Parry to the man who gasped out his life on the deck.

"Not this cruise, I think!

"If there is any other man of this dog's opinion—any two men among ye!" he cried, "take your weapons in your hands and stand forth!"

But they all stood silent, cowed to a man.

Parry slipped on one knee, the wild blow whistled over his head, and I saw a foot of shining steel sticking out between Harvey's shoulder-blades (*page* 86)

"So!" he said, slapping his sword back into the sheath, "then heave this carrion overboard, and let the work go forward!" And turning on his heel, he walked jauntily back to the poop, settling his tie and ruffles as he went.

CHAPTER VII

HOW ANDERSON AND HOOD JOINED CAPTAIN PARRY

Noon of the following day found the schooner heading under a gentle air for a rocky headland crowned with a few straggling coco palms, which John told me was the Island of Tortuga.

"The harbour lies behind yon cliff," said he, "and it's precious bad going hereabouts. It would be a bad job for the cap'n who would try to sail his ship in here not knowing the passage. But most o' the hands aboard this schooner could sail her in wi' half an eye, so to speak, in weather like this. It's Parry's reg'lar careening place and they've used it time and again."

I stood by Anderson as we got closer in, vainly searching for some sign of the harbour.

"He'll keep her on yon pinted bit o' rock sticking out o' the sea ahead," said John—"ye see it, yon one all white wi' sea-birds' dung?—till

them two big palm trees come in line. Watch an' ye'll see."

I did watch with all my might, for, so far as I could see—and I was blessed with hawk sight—the cliff, only half a mile away now, presented an apparently unbroken front.

There was a hush over the ship save for the creak of some gear and the steady ripple under her forefoot as she gently slipped along, with the canvas just drawing in the soft warm breeze.

"That will do, Becke," sung out Parry, when I was beginning to think the schooner would butt her nose against the rock.

Over went the tiller and round she came exactly as the two palms slided into one.

"Now then," said John, "watch ahead an' ye'll see something."

As he spoke a dark ragged line ran up and down the face of the cliff, widening every moment, till at last an opening some thirty yards wide presented itself.

Through this we glided for, it might be, twice the schooner's length, and emerged upon a little land-locked bay.

"Let go!" shouted Becke.

A plunge and a roar of cable tearing through

the hause pipe, and the ship swung to her anchor, and a rousing cheer burst from the crew at the success of their venture so far.

No sooner was the schooner anchored than the cutter was lowered, and Parry, Richards, and half a dozen men pulled rapidly ashore.

"They're off to see if the arms and powder kegs is all safe," said Hood, "an' when they come back you'll see some work done. There won't be many flies rest on this crew for the next two or three days, I'll lay a guinea."

Nothing could be sweeter than this cove in which we rode at anchor. Save for the narrow entrance the harbour was entirely land-locked. Where the schooner lay it would be about three hundred yards wide and narrowing all the way to a point which lost itself among the trees half a mile down.

On one side of the cove was a perpendicular cliff extending three parts of its length; the other was a fairy-like beach of pure white sand backed by a dense fringe of tree ferns and coco palms, among which numbers of gaudy-feathered parrakeets, startled by our coming, were flying and making the very deuce of a din.

There was not much time now to idle and dwell on the beauty of the harbour, for the

schooner was hardly made snug when Richards and two men burst out of the trees, and pulling back to the schooner ordered all hands ashore.

Nor was Hood far out in his reckoning when he said there would now be plenty of work for all.

The small arms and a long brass nine-pounder were hid in a great cave along with a large quantity of ammunition, gear, and ship's stores, and for the next three days from dawn to dark we sweated.

Three days almost of savage, eager toil, heaving out cargo, shipping muskets, cutlasses, powder, and shot, and rafting the big gun off to the schooner and mounting it on a platform on the fo'c'sle.

When I wasn't busy lugging all manner of gear down to the water's edge, I was trotting from one to the other with rum or brandy. If this was not brought at a hail, a blast of oaths and blood-curdling threats made me fly.

The schooner's appearance was altered by a broad band of black paint over her gay, chequered side, leaving her black from rail to water-line. Her name and port was blotted out and replaced with the name of the pirates' old ship

" Dolphin," and she lay at anchor now with an air of secret bloody evil about her, like a masked bravo.

On the afternoon of the third day everything was in readiness for putting to sea.

The hands were given the rest of this day to stand easy, it not being Parry's purpose to sail till the following morning. So, thankful to get away for a little when my work was done, I filled my pockets with lemons, and giving Hood a flask of spirits we left the freebooters carousing on the beach and walked with Anderson through the trees to the far end of the harbour.

Here we sat down in the shelter of a great tree fern by the side of a little stream that trickled out of the bushes, and rested for a long while smoking and contemplating the scene that lay before us.

Scores of birds, like great jewels, flashed to and fro, or screamed and chattered among the trees ; slim-legged waders fished along the beach ; not a cat's-paw ruffled the face of the water in this sheltered harbour, and every rope and spar of the schooner was mirrored as she floated motionless at anchor.

Far down we could hear the pirates laughing,

singing, and bawling at one another as the rum went round.

"Heyday!" said Anderson, who had been staring at the schooner.

"She's a bonnie boat and chock a block now full o' devilment and devastation. We'll be off the morn, to show her charms to the 'Castellan de la Plana.'

"Hear the crew," said he; "they're gambling the plunder already, an' some o' them having their last carouse. Oh, Lord, oh, Lord, how long!" he cried, shaking his fists in the air.

"'Vast heaving there, shipmet," said Hood, laying his pipe down and sitting up quickly.

"Don't you take on now; our turn to give 'em the slip'll be along directly.

"Here," said he, pulling the flask out of his pocket and a tin pannikin, "hand over one or two o' them lemons, sonny. This crew'll be all in the downs if we don't look up."

Half filling the mug with cool water from the stream, he poured in some rum, and squeezing a lemon into the mixture he handed it to Anderson saying:

"When a seaman is in the doldrums there ain't nothin' like a drop o' rumbo to give him a

fair wind. Drink it off, mate, an' keep yer mind easy.

"Talk to him, sonny," whispered Hood hurriedly, with an anxious look on his face. "Get him to yarn to ye; he takes on bad at times.

"We've had many's the rough passage, shipmet, you an' I together; many's the spell o' bad times, an' still fit an' hearty we are," he rattled on, nodding and winking at me while he made up another tinful of grog.

Now all the time I had known Anderson and Hood it had been a matter of mystery and endless speculation with me how they came to be among the freebooters, seeing that they always held themselves aloof and told me they took no part in the fighting or spoil of pirated ships, but for fear of giving offence I had always refrained from asking. John's manner, however, and Hood's evident concern at the same, emboldened me now. And further, because I know it soothes a body to talk sometimes when their troubles bear hard, I touched him on the shoulder and said quietly, "Tell me, John, how Hood and you come to be among this crew."

For a little while he didn't answer, and I was about to repeat my question when he gave a bit of a groan and said:

"How did we come among this crew? Well, boy, that's no' a long yarn, but I'll tell ye my share o' it, an' Hood there'll tell ye his, an' then ye'll understand."

Heaving himself into a sitting position he paused to tap the ashes of his pipe against his shoe and stared vacantly across the beach for a moment or two. At length he spoke.

"Twenty long year syne I sailed doon past Inch Keith an' May Island, an' that's the last I saw o' my hame, far off across the weary waters, in bonnie Scotland. A Port o' Leith man, and ship's carpenter was I aboard the 'Sappho,' a Leith barquetine, and outward bound for the further Indies.

"But we never made that port, for we were nabbed in the Downs by a man-o'-war and seven o' the likeliest among us pressed into the service, and the 'Sappho' she was never heard tell o' ever after.

"For seventeen years I served my king and country, in storm and calm, peace an' war, and the Lord kens if I did my dooty. I was aboord Sir Cloudesley Shovel's ship when she struck on the rocks west o' the Scilly Isles, her an' three more o' the fleet, and was lost wi' the admiral himself and nearly all hands; and a Don spiled

my beauty wi' a cutlass slash when we boarded and took the 'San Juan de Espano' off Cape Passaro.

"I liked the service well enough, and did my work, an' though I say it myself I'm a guid craftsman, so I sailed wi' a fair wind till the Pit's own bad luck drafted me aboord the frigate 'Andromeda,' and after that I never did a good han's turn."

Here the deep voice broke and the grim face hardened into a dark, stern frown.

"Of all the muckle overbearing swine that ever I sailed wi', Bully Day, o' the 'Andromeda,' was the worst by a lang sea mile, an' I've been shipmates wi' a few.

"For some reason or other, what it was I never could tell, the man took a spite at me, and aboord that ship I could do nothing to please him, an' he never spoke to me but to find fault and curse.

"For a twel'month the 'Andromeda' was a floating hell, and one black day when we had sailed into Port Royal for refitting, he badgered me aboot some work I was at, and forgetting myself I back-answered and asked him if he was na weary for I was, at which he called me every foul thing he could lay his tongue to and finished by smashing me in the face.

"Before I rightly kenned what I was aboot, I drapped him one between his pig's eyes, and that settled it."

Anderson's head sank on his chest and for a minute there was silence, Hood holding up a warning finger to me to remain quiet.

John raised his head.

"Aye, aye! that was the settling o' it, him an' me, that blow."

Pulling back his shirt-collar, said he, bending towards me:

"Pass yer han' doon inside my shirt an' feel my back, laddie."

I did as he asked.

"Heavens above us!" I cried, as I felt the skin of his broad back all criss-crossed with deep seams and wrinkles. "How was that done?"

"With the cat, my son," replied John quietly, pulling his collar and neckerchief straight. "A hunder an' fifty lashes at the triangle was what I got after seventeen year o' good and faithful service for returning a blow from a man that had cursed and bullied the life o' me for a year.

"I dinna ken yet how I got through the week after that, but I went back to dooty when I was

fit, wi' a raging devil and black murder in my heart, an' that very day the poor fool must range alongside an' ask me how I was feeling across the shoulders.

"I was dressing a plank at the time, and never letting on I heard him went on wi' my work.

"'D'ye hear, you swab? look up,' says he. I stood up an' stared full in his big, red, bully's face.

"'Perhaps you'll remember that hunder and fifty for a bit,' says he, 'but I'm not done wi' ye. I'll haze the life out o' ye yet!'

"An' whether it was me not answering that angered him I know not, but the end of it was, after cursing me for ten minutes, he spat in my face.

"The fiend in me got the upperhand at that and I swang my eech.*

"He saw that he had gone too far, his eyes started and the face of him went white as he gave a yell and tried to dodge; but too late, an' the next second he drapped wi' his skull clove in twa, like a rotten neep.†

"I made no bother after that, but gave up the eech and went quietly to limbo, an' next

* "Eech," Scots for adze. † Turnip.

day they made short work o' me on the quarter-deck.

"I was to swing at the yard-arm two days later. Hood'll tell ye the rest, boy; he knows it better than me."

"John wos to do a jig on nothing two days later," echoed Hood. "Ho, ho! we showed 'em a different kind o' dance, didn't we, mate?" chuckled the cook.

"Of course, me lad," said he, taking up the tale; "I can't reel it off like John, but this is about how the yarn goes, I reckon:

"I wos along wi' John aboard the 'Andromeda,' drafted into her together we were, so we're old shipmates, d'ye see, an' if it was bad times for him aboard her, neither wos it all beer and skittles for me, nor the most o' the lower deck. The cap'n was a born devil as ever stepped a plank, an' the officers, from the fust luff down, took their tip from him, an' it was one everlasting haze, world without end, amen; so we had a sweet time. Oh, she was a precious old barge to be aboard of, no mistake.

"Long had I my mind made up to run, so when old 'single deadlight' there was shoved in irons and sentenced to swing over his turn-up wi' the master-at-arms, I ups and says to

myself, says I, 'Hood, my hearty, the time's come for you to travel, and you've got to take some one along for company,' so I set my wits to work!

"After turning over a score o' moves, and getting kinks in my top hamper I haven't straightened out yet, I hit on one dodge which seemed the best o' the bunch; so when night come I goes ashore an' visits a party I knows of. Between us, we planned for him to pull off to the ship in his boat about two bells o' the second watch that same night, an' stand off an' on the stabboard side o' the 'Andromeda,' making on he were a-fishing. Then we arranged things in the way o' provisions for the boat, an' that done I went aboard again an' stood by for night, me being in the stabboard second watch. Now, by reason of the ship being overhauled for repairs on the lower deck, John was laying wi' irons on his legs between two guns on the main deck wi' a Joey* doin' sentry go over him; but I managed to give John the office to keep his weather eye open.

"The hardest job I had was to get a key to unlock the irons, but I managed that through the armourer's mate.

* Marine.

" It weren't much of a trick to crawl along beneath the gun muzzles to where John lay an' pass him the key when the sentry was on the move.

" John cast himself loose in a brace o' shakes, an' when all was ready, I rose like a ghost behind that poor Joey and downed him wi' a welt behind the ear as very near knocked his figure-head off. There was very little noise, for John caught him as he fell, an' I caught his musket, an' we dragged him quietly between the guns. You can bet we didn't hang long in the wind after that. Biddin' John follow, I up wi' the gun port an' lowered myself into the water by the gun tackle. He was after me in a jiffy, an' together we struck out quickly for the boat, which lay like a dark blot about fifty yards out.

" We hadn't swum a dozen strokes afore John were missed, an' I can tell you there was some shouting an' runnin' up an' down aboard the ' Andromeda.' Lucky for us, the night wos dark an' cloudy, an' we reached the boat afore they spotted us.

" Then the balls began to zip in the water all around, an' we could hear 'em pipin' away the boat's crew. Climbing into the boat, we laid in to them oars an' made her fly, for it was neck

or nothing now wi' both o' us ; if we were caught I'd hang wi' John sure.

" They fired a blank gun to warn the guards ashore, an' presently we could hear the patrol boats shouting to one another ; so the town was barred, an' astern we could hear the pursuit, but by this time we were lost sight of in the gloom.

" ' Pull for the west side,' says John, gruntin' at his oar. So round we slewed her an' pulled like blue blazes an' gained the black shadow of the trees without being seen.

" Here we rested a bit to land the cove that picked us up, and when the ship's boats raced by we 'bout ship an' made for the open sea.

" There wos a mast in the boat wi' a scrap o' lug sail furled round it, an' after rowin' for a mile or two we thought we would chance it an' take advantage of a bit o' wind blowin' from the sou'-east ; so we up with the sail and bore away for Portland Pint. We had an idea o' coasting along through the night an' layin' up through the day till we made Savannah la Mar, where there would be a chance o' shipping as merchant Jacks, an' so get clear away ; but wi' dawn the good luck that held so far left us. The wind veered, comin' on to blow hard off the land, an' drove us clean out to sea, an' after

very nigh bustin' ourselves tryin' to row agin wind an' tide, we chucked it an' let her go.

" Things began to look serious then, by the living jingo they did that, for all we had in that blessed boat was a calabash o' water, a bottle o' rum, some meat, an' a little bag o' biscuit, so ye see we weren't fitted out for a cruise across the Caribbean.

" By night we were tossing about somewhere off the Pedro Bank, an' there the wind left us.

" Great Davy Jones, when I think of it ! " said Hood, pausing to heave a tremendous sigh. " Three nights an' four mortal days did we blister and shrivel in the boat, my lad, water all gone on the second day ; as for the rum, John hove that overboard, it only makin' us thirstier.

" The fourth day I must 'ave fallen into a sort of swound an' dreaming I wos a-setting cool an' airy in the tap o' the ' Crown and Anchor ' in Bristol city, an' jest about to stick my face in a bucket o' ice-cold frothing ale, when I come to, dry as tinder, wi' the devil's own racket close aboard, an' John pulling my ear.

" I looks up an' found we were bobbing about alongside a schooner. For a second or two thinks I we're took ; but the sight o' the crowd

looking down at us told me here wos no man-o'-war.

"'Ho, there, the boat!' hailed one of 'em.

"'Who are ye? Where d'ye hail from? Where are ye bound, eh? Is this an exploring expedition, or are ye genelmen o' fortune, an' do ye fly the "Jolly Roger"?'

"The last o' this string o' questions seemed to tickle 'em in a funny place. There was a general all-round 'haw, haw,' which stopped pretty sudden when some one we couldn't see sung out:

"'Belay there, an' get 'em aboard; I want to speak 'em!"

"'Are ye deaf an' dumb, blast yer eyes?' says the funny man—him ye know as Becke. 'Lay hold o' this 'ere!'

"John caught the bight of a rope that was slung to us, an' made fast.

"'Step aboard now, genelmen; the cap'n wants a word wi' ye!' says Becke.

"They had to help us up the side, we wos that far done, an' when they had give us a swig o' brandy an' water, marched us aft to where—tricked out like a peacock an' takin' snuff out o' that everlastin' box o' his—wos Cap'n Parry, only we didn't know him then.

"'Ho!' says he, when he had looked us up

an' down for a minute, ' where are ye bound for, genelmen? What do ye, so far at sea in that boat, eh? '

" ' Blowed out to sea, sir! ' says I.

" ' Where from? ' says he.

" ' Savannah! ' says I.

" ' Liar! ' says he.

" Then he puts his hands behind him, an' grinning like a Cheshire cat, says, soft an' easy :

" ' Did you happen to hear in your travels of the recent doings aboard His Majesty's ship " Andromeda," genelmen? No? You surprise me! '

" ' Well! ' says he, looking hard at John, ' a seaman answering to your remarkable appearance is being very anxiously inquired for, he having murdered an officer; and,' he says, turning on me, ' they would like to hear of a genelman o' your fit as helped him to escape after killing the sentry! '

" We looked precious silly at that, you may take your davy, an' it wos plain he knew all about us. I wos sorry I had done for the Joey, but we afterwards found out he told a black lie there.

" ' Hark 'ee! ' says he, sharp an' sudden.

' I am Cap'n Parry, and here is how matters stand between us ; I want a ship's carpenter and a cook. You, I take it, want to save your necks, eh ? Good ! Now here's my offer. Join my company, and if you are squeamish, I'll engage you do naught but your work as carpenter and cook, and pay ye fair seaman's wages ! '

" ' And if we don't take on ? ' said John.

" ' Very good, my men,' he answers, wi' quite a pleasant smile across his face, ' your boat is alongside ; you can continue your voyage !

" ' Come, genelmen, what d'ye say ? time flies ! '

" ' Would ye give us some grub an' water and our bearings ? ' says I.

" ' Not a biscuit, nothing ! ' says he. ' Damn me!' he cried, ' but I like your infernal impidence. Why, if I wos to do my dooty, I'd hang ye both without further parley ! '

" John and I looked at one another, but it was no go ; there was nothing for it but take on, for he had us in a clove-hitch, d'ye see. To go back in the boat was going to sure and certain death ; so we took on wi' Captain Parry. That was three year now past and gone. Many a rough time we've seen since, many an ill deed, an' never a chance has come o' giving 'em the slip yet ; but it will, boys, never fear," he cried,

bringing a great hand down on his thigh with a smack like a pistol shot. "We'll show 'em a clean pair o' heels one o' these fine arternoons, my hearties, as sure as gun's iron; so cheer up an' pass along that rum an' lemons, sonny, while I mix another caulker. I'm as dry as I wos the day Parry picked us out o' the sea."

CHAPTER VIII

HOW THEY TOOK THE "CASTELLAN DE LA PLANA"

EARLY next morning we towed out through the narrow passage, some of the hands casting loose as we went, and once outside, the re-named schooner "Dolphin" heeled over to the breeze and we were off on that quest which boded so ill for the "Castellan de la Plana." Glancing astern I thought never was there such a snug hiding-place for buccaneers; we had scarcely come three cables' length, and the entrance to the passage had disappeared.

There was still plenty to do, preparing for the dark work in hand, and we were kept busy cleaning and oiling arms and a score of matters, but all the time my heart was heavy with the future.

It was plain that John and Hood were no favourites of either Parry or his crew. It was only because they were useful they were tolerated

about the chances and whether the boy knew that they would be waiting for a mile to the back of a point that ran a plunge into the sea, would likely be too wild.

Everyone wishing that someone knowing and brought might think of was left to chance.

The passage between Cuba and Hispaniola is over eighty miles wide, but owing to the strong tides everyone kept well to windward, as every chance was in favour of one being driven to the leeward.

After there was Perry's offer of a hundred guineas to the lad who sighted her, to keep all hands watching every way to the south-east. For seamen wouldn't the boy believe you'd ever see, and all they that you was never wrong.

About six bells in the afternoon we were a high headland and pointing it out to John I asked him what he was.

"Are that's la Cape Maze," said he, "or it's somewhere in there water, we'll make the land."

Perry came on deck a little later, and after inspecting the land through his glass, turned and spoke to Bates, who instantly roared:

"Ready, boys, ready!"

"What's going to happen now?" said Hood, as we sat in the deck-house smoking.

"Ye'll observe," said John, stoppering the tobacco with his little finger, "they're puttin' her aboot. Well, we're right in the throat of the Windward Passage. Yonders Cape Maysi," said he, pointing to the land which now lay astern; "by and by we'll raise the land north o' San Nicholas, then we'll go about again, an' it'll be 'bout ship, 'bout ship, dodging back and forrit till the barque heaves in sight!

"If Parry's information is good she can't be many leagues away with this breeze."

A thrill of expectancy pervaded the schooner; the men were grouped in little knots at their stations by the braces and sheets, talking to one another in low tones, and every now and then one would climb as far as the fore or main top and peer long and hard under his hand into the southern blue.

Even Parry had lost some of his usual cool, indolent manner, for he paced up and down the poop, with soft, quick, cat-like stride, halting every little to level his glass in the same direction. But the sun sank below the western sea and nothing hove in sight.

No one thought of sleep, and all through the

night every eye was strained to catch the first glimpse of the Spaniard.

The dawn came at length and showed an empty sea; the sunrise came in all its tropic glory, but not so much as a cloud flecked the distant horizon.

The morning wore on, the pirates were piped to breakfast. I had cleared away the breakfast things in the cabin and was busy laying out Parry's clothes for the day, when I heard a hurricane hail of "Sail ho!" come from aloft, immediately followed by another.

Parry sprang up the companion ladder, and when I came on deck I found all hands swarming aloft.

"Where away?" hailed Parry.

"Broad abeam, far down to the su'thard!" was the answering cry.

I stared with all my might in the direction hailed by the look-out, but could see nothing of a ship.

Parry climbed as far as the cross-trees and swept the sea with his glass. Closing it at last he descended, saying to Richards and Becke, as he swung himself on deck, "I believe it is the Don. We shall know for certain in half an hour."

Waiting to hear no more, I darted below to finish the work in the cabin. Hoarse commands resounded along the deck, and soon I could tell by the altered motion of the schooner and a list to larboard we were heading in direction of the strange sail.

Having put the finishing touches on the cabin, I went on deck to find the freebooters feverishly at work putting the schooner in fighting trim. The long brass gun on the fo'c'sle had been stripped of its cover, powder and ball were being brought on deck, muskets and pistols were being primed and loaded, a great heap of cutlasses lay on the main hatch. Men were busy reeving double braces and clearing the decks of anything likely to hinder rapid movement.

Cutting along to the deck-house, I found John quietly smoking his pipe in the midst of all this turmoil.

"Can you see the ship?" I asked eagerly.

"Aye, I can see her!" he said, stepping to the side and spitting overboard, "and I doubt it's the 'Castellan,' God help her. Here," said he, placing his hand on my shoulder and pulling me in front of him. "Look beyond the end of the starboard cat-head—d'ye see her now?" and he pointed to the splotch of white that stood

up against the blue sky far down on the horizon.

"I've no reason to love the Spaniards, but if they show fight, make your mind up to see some devil's work, lad."

Half an hour dragged on, the pirates clustered forrard straining their eyes at the on-coming ship, and turning every little while to throw a questioning glance at the poop, where Parry stood watching through his glass.

At the end of the half-hour he closed his glass with a snap, saying something to Richards, who stood near him, and a moment later the word was passed along, amid a roar of exultation, that it was the Spaniard.

"Keep her off a point or so!" cried Parry. "We will wait until he is abreast of us and then run down on him. Run that Spanish flag up, one of ye; he'll be anxious by and by to know who we are!

"Serve out the rum to the men, Becke!" he added, in a lower tone. "It may happen we shall have our work to do with him and it will have to be done swiftly; these waters are as thick as the English Channel with men-o'-war nowadays, begad!"

So saying, he fell to pacing the deck again.

Half sick with excitement and dread, I stood beside Hood—who puffed his pipe calm and cool—and watched the barque coming up with the breeze behind her.

We had made a long reach to larboard as if we meant to avoid her, when Parry gave the word to Becke—and so swiftly was it done, that almost as quick as I write the words the schooner was put about, and with the wind fair abeam and every stitch drawing we bore down on the "Castellan de la Plana."

There would be a matter of four sea miles between us and the barque when the schooner was put about, and now this was being rapidly diminished.

Said Hood: "Now for it, Ned, my lad. Sink me, but I believe he's going to fight."

"Aha, I thought so; he smelt a rat; look at him!" cried John, pointing to the Spaniard yonder. He goes about."

I saw the sails shiver and the shadows on them change as the Spaniard, showing us his heels, headed away for the north-west.

"I thought he wouldn't fight!" said John. "What wi' the maulings they've been getting these years back, there's not much backbone left in the Dons. He's away for Santiago, but,

poor chap, we'll be within shot o' yon waggon in another ten knots. There's Richards getting ready!"

As the old seaman said, the barque was no sailor; it was not very apparent at first, but before an hour had gone by, the distance between us was less by a mile. Richards and his gun's crew were busy loading on the fo'c'sle. The minutes flew by on lightning wings as we stormed along, gaining on the barque with every bound.

"Try her with a shot now, Richards!" cried Parry.

For answer, Richards stooped over his gun and aimed long and carefully.

"Fire!" he cried at length, and every one sprang to the weather side to watch the effect of the shot.

The loud bang of the gun sent a tremor through the schooner, making Hood's crockery rattle and dance in the racks, and a few seconds later a column of white spray sprang into the air astern of the barque, showing that we were not yet within range.

"Short by a quarter of a mile!" called Parry, who had been watching through his glass. "Another half an hour should do it!"

Quickly the gun was sponged out and reloaded, and again the schooner's crew was hushed in expectancy.

Presently we saw Richards stoop, and again the long gun spoke.

"Smack through her main topsail!" shouted Parry. "Now we have her, Richards; her spars, mind ye, my man, her spars!"

The deadly game now began in earnest. Richards and his crew worked their gun like devils, and shot after shot soared through the air, almost every one taking effect. About the seventh or eighth shot there was a shiver in the barque's upper canvas, and down came her main royal and main topgallant sails.

A howl of exultation greeted the success of the shot, and some of the pirates danced about the deck like madmen.

But we were not going to have it all our own way, and though the Spaniard did not mount a gun of the range of our big one, he was armed with several guns of a smaller calibre, which now began to talk back to us.

"There's some blood in him, after all!" said Hood. "See, he's going to make a fight of it!"

A ball from the Spaniard fell with a hissing

plomp in the sea about twenty fathoms short of us, and seeing it was useless to run, he brought his ship round head to wind, thus bringing his broadside to bear on us. Faster and faster became his fire, while the gunner and his men, black with powder and smoke, worked like fiends at the nine-pounder.

Aloft the barque was soon a complete wreck, the poop was plainly visible from the schooner, and as the ships neared one another the crackle of musketry broke out.

Richards now came limping aft dripping with perspiration, his eyes glaring like a wild beast's in his powder-blackened face.

"The gun'll burst if I load her again!" he shouted to Parry with a frightful oath.

"Never mind!" answered Parry, "she has done well; we shall be aboard him in another ten minutes. Let the men be served with rum!"

"Aft with ye, ye idler!" Richards snarled at me as he passed, "and fetch a bucket of rum on deck!"

Catching up a bucket I dived below and filled it, wishing at the same time I could have poisoned it. Carrying it on deck I passed round the men and served every one with a pannikin holding

nearly half a pint, which each man tossed off like so much water.

In the middle of this work—which I did with no small amount of trepidation, for the air was full of whistling bullets and splinters of wood—a crash aloft and a shout of "Stand from under!" told us we were hit among the spars, and I sprang into the deck-house out of the way of falling wreckage.

"What's carried away?" shouted Parry.

"Topgallant yard!" answered Becke.

"Lively there, Anderson, get the raffle cut adrift and see to the damage!" he ordered.

Half a dozen men with axes raced aloft led by Anderson, and in a few minutes they cleared the wreck away, and were busy reeving fresh gear.

The Spaniard had ceased to fire for a few moments, but still the flag fluttered from the stump of his foremast.

"Down, men!" yelled Parry. "He's going to give us a broadside for the last."

I had hardly realised what he had shouted and was still staring open-mouthed, when a hand caught me by the collar and I was flung on my face behind the combing of the main hatch.

"Are ye deaf?" growled Hood in my ear, as he pressed me to the deck.

An ear-stunning roar, followed by the grinding crash of splintered woodwork and cries of mortal agony told that the Spaniard's broadside had taken effect.

"There's work for old John now, I'll bet a gill o' rum," said Hood, rising to his feet. "You stay where ye are, or, better still, if ye got a strong stomach, come wi' me and we'll help the doctor get ready."

Again the shout of Parry rang high above the din: "Ready there, all hands!"

Round under the barque's stern we swept, up went the helm, and with a staggering crash the schooner was alongside her prey and grapples holding her fast.

The big cutter was stowed keel uppermost on the main hatch, and climbing up I looked over as the grappling-irons were flung, binding us together.

"Now, bullies all!" shouted Parry, as with a bound he mounted the rail, "follow me!"

With a terrific yell the pirates swarmed up the barque's side after him, and down among the Spaniards they leapt, roaring, hacking, and

stabbing like fiends, Parry—his long hair unbound—ever foremost, urging them on with yells of encouragement. Hither and thither he sprang, stabbing and screaming like a fury out of the pit, a cruel, treacherous, bloodthirsty devil, but a fearless one.

Stubborn and bravely did the crew of the barque fight for their lives, and they far outnumbered the pirates, but suddenly cries of rage broke out as they found themselves attacked and cut down by men of their own crew. Nothing could withstand this second assault combined with the ferocious onslaught lead by Parry. They broke, and were forced slowly back, some to the poop and some to the fo'c'sle.

"Take the captain prisoner!" I heard Parry cry above the roar of the fight, and I could see him striving to reach a tall man who was cheering his men and giving a good account of himself with a long shining rapier, evidently the captain of the barque.

At last the two captains met, and, thinks I—as the two men paused for a moment at blade's length—here is one that will stop your rush, Captain Parry. But no, as they warily engaged, the squat form of the gunner stooped swiftly behind the captain of the barque, and clasping

And clasping him round the legs threw him heavily to the deck (*page* 121)

him round the legs threw him heavily to the deck.

The fall of their captain took the heart out of the Spaniards; more fiercely the exultant pirates pressed them, and with a cry of despair they fled along the deck.

Like wolves harrying a flock of sheep, the pirates hunted them to the foot of the ladders, cutting down the hindmost. The few that gained the upper decks prepared to make a last desperate stand there and sell their lives as dearly as possible.

The pirates paused a moment to gain breath for the final attack. The fight still raged fiercely in the fore part of the ship—when high above the roar and clash of the fight came a shrill hail from aloft on the schooner of "Sail! Sail ho!"

There was a lull, in which the cry of the look-out again sounded loud and clear.

At the second hail there was a rush of pirates to the barque's side, some clambering into the shot-torn rigging, all sending anxious glances in the direction indicated by the watcher's out-stretched arm.

"What does she look like?" shouted Parry.

"A big ship hull down to su'thard, and rising fast!" was the answer.

For a moment Parry looked fiercely round, wolf-like, with clenched glistening teeth, as if undecided. Then springing on the rail he ran up the mizzen rigging, and shading his eyes glared long and carefully at the oncoming ship.

Regaining the deck, he spoke sternly to the Spanish captain, and called out a number of quick sharp orders that were immediately taken up by Richards and Becke.

"'Vast heaving there, forrard!" bellowed Richards.

The pirates fell back at the word, and the captain of the barque holding up his hand shouted some words in Spanish to the remnant of his crew, whereupon they that were holding the poop dropped their weapons and passed along the deck to their comrades on the fo'c'sle.

"Quick there, for your lives!" cried Parry. "That's a man-o'-war down there; get the wounded aboard the schooner. Three of ye come with me and bring that dog along!" pointing to the captain.

He then called Richards to his side and, giving him some order in an undertone, turned to the captain and, threatening him with a pistol, fiercely commanded him to lead the way to the cabin.

As for the deck of the barque, I cannot attempt

to describe it. Blood—nothing but blood! Gouts and splashes of it everywhere, and dead and wounded men, and now the cries and oaths of the wounded pirates, as they were lifted and flung aboard the schooner in desperate hurry by their now thoroughly alarmed shipmates, added to the scene of horror.

I could see there was a big gap in the schooner's crew.

"Thirteen of us out o' mess!" said one ruffian.

"That's a baker's dozen more shares to us that's left!" replied another, with a brutal laugh.

We could hear the splintering and crashing of woodwork as they routed the cabin, and then followed the muffled report of a pistol shot, followed by the reappearance of Parry on deck.

"Bear a hand with these cases, some of ye!" he cried.

A number of men ran to help, and between them a dozen heavy iron-clamped chests were quickly passed aboard the schooner.

"Aboard with ye, every man!" he ordered, as he followed the last chest over the side.

"Cast loose there, Becke, and set every stitch that will draw!"

The gunner was the last man to leave the

barque, and on coming out of the cabin with another bucket full of rum for the men which Becke had sent me for, I heard him say in answer to Parry :

" She will float maybe two hours, not more, for, besides what I've done, she's got a couple of shots between wind and water, and it's pouring in as through a sieve."

Then I knew they had scuttled her, and I shivered and crept away to serve out the rum.

There was a feverish hurry and bustle as we rapidly drew away from the barque ; the damage to the topgallant yard was made good. Some were busy reeving new braces and running gear that had been shot away by the Spaniard's last broadside, and many an anxious glance was cast in direction of the man-o'-war, which was now within eight or nine miles of us and in full view from the deck.

When I had served every man with rum I hurried below and quickly got everything ready against the captain's coming—clean linen and a fresh suit of clothes. The cabin was always hateful to me, and I dreaded being there while Parry was below, so I always made haste to get away from it. But before I had finished his step

sounded on the companion ladder, and he passed through the cabin to his sleeping berth without bestowing a glance upon me.

With a hurried look round to make sure that everything was in readiness I turned to go. The door of his berth had swung open, and throwing a fearsome glance at him as I passed I saw him seated on his bed examining and turning over a long dark box he held in his hands.

I thought little of the incident at the time, but, as it afterwards turned out, that was not the last I was to see of that same long dark box.

The crew were at a hurried meal of pork and biscuit, washed down with pannikins of grog. When I went to the galley I found Anderson and Hood at theirs, watching the barque through the open door as they ate.

"He scuttled her, the born devil!" Anderson was saying as I entered. "The man-o'-war will stand by to take the captain and what's left o' her crew off, and he reckoned on gaining a knot or two by that!"

"They won't take the captain off!" said Hood, reaching for a cinder to light his pipe.

"What d'ye mean?" questioned Anderson.

"I mean that Parry murdered him in the cabin after they got the blunt, leastways I heard

them talking about it, and yon pistol shot pints that way."

"By the Lord!" said Anderson; "I could almost wish we were overhauled by yon fellow and brought to book. I'd swing happy, so I would, if that hell hound and his crew were strung up alongside!"

"What d'ye think his move is now?" said Hood, waving the last remark aside.

"There's only one thing he can do!" said Anderson, rising and looking across the sea at the sunset. "Carry on all as she goes till night comes, and then haul his wind for Tortuga. Maybe the man-o'-war'll carry on right through the Passage, thinking we will make for the open sea!"

"Parry'll hope to give him the slip like that in the night, but I'm not in love wi' the looks of yon sunset!" he continued, with another look at the sky. "There'll be a blast o' wind along afore we're twenty-four hours older, or I don't know the signs o' a West Indy hurricane.

"He'll not attempt the harbour in a storm, and if it comes from the north he'll run before it, and maybe fetch up among the Leewards!"

"Well!" says Hood, "the more leagues he

puts between us and these waters, the safer I'll feel my neck. If he don't make the harbour, Isle of Aves'll be his mark maybe, and then it's like enough this crew'll scatter for a spell. The seas'll fair swarm wi' cruisers after this."

CHAPTER IX

HOW THE SCHOONER CAME TO THE ISLAND

THE schooner was heading for the Windward Passage with every stitch set, and all the hands that were able busy making good the damage that had been done by the Spaniards' fire. Parry with Becke and Richards stood talking together on the poop while they watched the strange sail draw near the sinking barque. She hove-to when abreast of the Spaniard, but it could only have been long enough to take off the few that were left alive of her crew, for word was passed from aloft that she was holding on her course in our wake.

Just before sunset the look-out hailed the deck and reported the topsails of a large ship standing in from the N.E. through the Passage, so when the darkness had blotted the pursuing ship from sight, the schooner's course was altered to S.E. Word was passed for all lights to be doused, and death

threatened to any man that struck tinder even to light a pipe.

All through this night of suspense, made hideous with the groans and oaths of the wounded, I helped Hood and one or two of the less brutal ruffians to tend them. Most of their hurts were cutlass slashes, but three of the men had bad gun-shot wounds, and they died before dawn, and their bodies were flung overboard.

Towards the daybreak the freebooters were wondering whether the pursuit had been given the slip; but when the sun rose she was plain to be seen far down to the north, but following steadily in our wake, so Parry's ruse came to naught.

The breeze held good, and Parry never left the deck all day. Twice he bade me bring him food and drink; that he took as he paced the deck with Richards limping at his elbow.

Every trick and manner of seamanship was tried to increase the stretch of sea between us, and it grew monotonous to hear Becke's orders for a pull on this brace, or ease off a little on that.

The pirates hung about the deck staring at the pursuit and cleaning their arms.

So the day passed, and at nightfall there was a drawn, desperate look about the crew, for the

chase had crept up on us all day, slowly and steadily like grim avenging fate, and there was no need to go aloft ; she was plain from the deck, a large corvette—His Britannic Majesty's ship "Sea Horse," and well known to every man on board the schooner, for she was lying in Port Royal Harbour when we sailed.

To make matters worse, the wind fell. By sunset it was a dead calm, and it was Anderson's opinion that if the calm held they would come at us in the boats with the first streak of daylight.

"But mind ye!" he concluded, "this crew will fight to the last gasp like rats in a trap, and Parry'll blow the ship up rather than be took!"

It was little we slept aboard the schooner that night.

When morning came the corvette lay as helpless as the schooner, heaving and pitching on the long, sluggish swells, about four miles off.

The sun rose, red and dim as in the midst of a dust-storm, and all the morning we lay gasping under a sky of brass watching for some move on the part of the corvette.

Noon came, dinner passed, and still no change.

Hood stood in the galley door filling his pipe, his big face glistening with grease and perspiration. How the man stood the additional heat of the fire and the hot, sickly smell of the cooking was more than I could make out.

"That's a blasted queer colour the sky's taken on away there to the nor'-east!" said he to Anderson, as we three stood together.

"I've been watching it for the past half-hour!" said Anderson. "This has been brewing for the past two days, as I told ye, and we've got to thank that same queer sky for the corvette's boats not attacking us. He's afraid o' the weather, and won't risk it!"

"I hope it's a breeze of some sort!" I said, wiping my streaming face.

"We'll have a breeze along this way afore you're much older, my son, as'll satisfy bigger men than you!" said John. "If there's not a thundering hurricane behind yon, call me a Dutchman."

There was an unnatural stillness in the air, and the sea heaved in long, sullen, oily hills and valleys unbroken by foam, amid which the schooner, with no way on her, rose and fell in staggering lurches and sickening downward swoops, rolling and pitching, straining every

timber, and causing the sails to flap and bang in a manner that made one think the masts would be torn out of her.

All along the north-east there hung a heavy haze, dull copper-coloured, out of which long streamers of blue-black woolly cloud had begun to shoot across the sky.

Parry, who had been called on deck, ordered sail to be shortened immediately he saw the sky, and speedily the schooner lay under a close-reefed topsail, jib, and stay-foresail. With inconceivable rapidity the ragged clouds spread over the heavens, lightning glimmered in the haze, and a dull rumble of distant thunder told of the gathering storm.

"Yonder comes your breezy!" said Anderson, pointing to a long line of foam that stretched across the sea. A moaning sound filled the air, increasing in volume every moment. The sky was now completely overcast, and nearer and nearer came the gleaming line of foam.

"Here comes the corvette," said Hood, pointing, and as we watched the storm caught her and heeled her over in a smother of foam.

"Come!" said John, catching me by the arm, "into the deck-house with ye!"

It was but a step, yet we had scarce gained the door when the hurricane was upon us.

As the first terrific blast struck her, the schooner heeled over until the sea poured in the scuppers, and for one heart-catching, breathless minute no man thought she would right,

A report like a shot of a big gun was heard through the shrieking, howling storm, and John looked out of the door.

"Thank God for that!" he shouted. "Yon's the jib away; she was carrying too much!

"Look at the 'Sea Horse'!" he shouted again. "Her fore-topmast's gone!" And through the door we could dimly see through the storm the corvette flying before it half-wrecked.

Slowly the schooner righted as she felt the helm, and gathering way every moment, southward we flew before the booming gale.

The sea rose quickly and chased us in mountainous combers, adding terror to the night that closed in.

Speaking was now out of the question, so I lit the lamp, and feeling it would be safer owing to the terrific leaping and pitching of the schooner, I crawled into my bunk and lay watching John and Hood, who sat with their feet braced against a locker calmly smoking.

The long, sleepless night dragged on, and the grey, dreary dawn broke, showing the raging, tossing sea and no sign of the corvette or of abatement in the storm. Two days and nights we drove before it, and dawn of the third day found no break in the weather. But drive we must, for any attempt to bring the schooner up in the wind was to court almost certain disaster and shipwreck.

It was with the greatest difficulty anything in the shape of hot food could be prepared ; and the long strain had told heavily upon all hands, as with pale, haggard faces they watched for any sign of the storm breaking.

" Sink me ! " shouted Hood, after clawing his way along from the galley—where he had been cleaning up after breakfast—to the deck-house, where Anderson and I sat smoking, " where are we going to bring up ? Never in all my born days did I ever see such a blow as this 'ere, never. All I hope is some o' them Looward Isles don't get athwart us ; and next glass of rum I get I'll drink the health of the bully boys as put this little hooker together."

I reached under the bunk and pulled out a little jar of rum I had smuggled out of the cabin, and filling up a couple of pannikins, handed them to the two old shipmates.

John's solitary eye winked as he wagged his head at me, and Hood with a broad grin stood up, shook me warmly by the hand, pointed to the deck, then to his rum, and drank it off with tremendous gusto. Patting me on the head with a huge hand, he sat down again to fill his pipe; but that pipe was never filled.

A chorus of yells came from where the men were clustered about the fo'c'sle. We sprang to our feet, looking with alarm at one another. Again it sounded; high above the shrieking storm rose the cry:

"Breakers! Breakers! Hard a starboard!"

Anderson and Hood made their way forrard, and watching for a level deck, I made a dash for the fo'c'sle ladder and climbed up.

"Watch as she rises," roared one of the men, as Becke and Parry gained the fo'c'sle.

The man pointed straight ahead, and as we rose on a monstrous sea, through the driving spray and sea smoke, we saw the dark mass of a long hilly island, and all along its base a line of snow-white breakers.

The island would be about a mile away, and we were pointing to the west end of it. They set a bit of the jib and brought the schooner round with the wind on her quarter, which was as much

as we dared in such a sea. It was enough. We cleared a low, rocky headland that formed the westerly end of the island, but I could have tossed a biscuit on the rocks as we stormed past.

Once clear of this point, the helm was shifted again. We ran in to leeward, finding smooth water close inshore, owing to the height of the land. They took soundings, keeping the lead going until the leadsman sung out six fathoms, when the anchor was let go about a hundred and fifty yards from the shore.

We then had the first good hot meal in three days, and while we were eating it the hurricane broke, and towards the evening the wind had died quite away. The heavy sky cleared to the south, and the hot sun shone out of a cloudless blue sky again.

About an hour before the time to lay out the dishes for Captain Parry's supper some message took me aft. What it was has escaped my memory in the excitement of the events that followed, but, as you shall see, my going there at that moment was the means of saving our lives.

The poop was empty as I went aft, Parry being in the cabin with Richards and Becke.

The crew were all forrard, lounging about the fo'c'sle. A low mutter of voices came through the open skylights. The door of the cabin below me was open an inch or so, and I had taken a step or two down the companion when the name of Anderson stopped me dead. The next few words caused me to withdraw softly to the deck, and I crouched at the head of the steps with my heart thumping against my ribs and ears strained to catch every whisper.

It was the harsh croak of the gunner :

" Aye, Anderson, Hood, and that boy, wot's to be done wi' them when we fetch up in Teach's old quarters ? " he demanded.

" They'll never see Teach's old quarters," said Parry, " but I shall use 'em to the last. When we sight the rendezvous they go overboard for shark-bait ! "

" Some o' the hands is soft on Anderson and the cook. Why not put 'em all ashore there ? " said Becke.

Though it was swift death to be caught I crept down a few steps, and holding on to the rail leaned forward with my head close to the open door to hear what came next.

" Harkee, Becke, this is my last cruise for a spell. The boy is the last of the schooner's old

crew. When he goes over the side, that's a clean sweep of them. Then the other two, if ever they were taken off this island, there's a chance of them being recognised, and if they are they will talk to save their skins. Last of all, once we fetch up at Teach's old quarters and the booty safe ashore we three sail in the cutter."

"An' wot of the hands?" asked Richards.

Here came a scuffle as of some one getting out of a seat, and as I slipped up on deck the cabin door banged shut.

There was silence for a moment, then crash came a blow on the cabin table, and the gunner cried, "Strike me blind, Capting, but I'm proud to sail wi' ye; never a man that's flown the Jolly Roger could lay alongside o' ye!" And he burst into a roar of laughter.

I waited to hear no more, but got off that poop and along to the deck-house, my heart pumping fit to choke me, and the laughter of those three villains ringing in my ears.

Anderson and Hood were seated inside talking, with their heads close together when I came up.

"Why, Ned, you're white as death—wot's up? Have ye seen a ghost?" said Hood.

"Watch that no one hears," I whispered. "Parry and Becke and Richards are aft there in the cabin planning to murder the three of us." And while they watched through the open doors that none should hear, I told them what I had heard at the cabin door.

They looked from one to the other when I had finished.

"The bloody-minded sharks," said Anderson, drawing a deep breath. "It's not only us, but the whole crew they mean; an' they'd do it too. Parry an' Richards they'd enj'y doin' it, an' Becke will obey orders, you can lay your life!"

"How about blowin' this yarn quietly to the hands? There's some friendly ones," said Hood.

"I vote we do nothing o' the sort," said Anderson; "it's a chance they'd jist laugh at us, an' then where would we be—nearer death than we are now."

"Well, we're not goin' to sit still here an' have our throats cut like blasted sheep, are we? By the Lord, I'm for the shore there, where we can put up some sort of fight for our lives," said Hood, his voice shaking with passion.

"Steady your hellum, shipmate, let's think this move out quietly," replied Anderson. "This

hasn't altered our plans. Ye see, Ned, me an' Hood have agreed that we three should up hellum an' run for it to-night, an' we've bin making a few things ready against the time when all's dark."

"That's so," said Hood.

"We'll just keep quiet an' carry on as we're doing," said Anderson.

"You heard what Ned says; it's after the schooner gets to sea they mean doin' for us, so we have this night, anyhow, and the crew likely deep in rum before long. We'll swim for it then.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, Ned; for your life don't let 'em see you've got the shakers. We'll be snug ashore there afore morning on that blessed old island; and once ashore we're safe, if I know this crew."

How I managed to lay out Parry's supper and clear away after he had finished I don't know, but I kept a stout heart by saying to myself "This is the last time," and by watching him like a cat watching a mouse contrived to do most of what was necessary while he was on deck.

It was after supper, when I was thanking my stars the work in the cabin was finished, a terrible thing happened that came nigh to wrecking all

our plans and bringing us to the very threshold of death.

I stood leaning over the bulwarks abreast of the deck-house looking across the stretch of water that separated the schooner from the yellow beach. The level rays of the setting sun stole softly over the island, turning it into a gorgeous picture of green and gold, and purple shadow. Scores of birds waded and fished in the shallows along shore, and across the sea came the long whispering rustle of foliage in the evening breeze.

Here on the schooner all was blood and strife and cruel death, yonder peace and safety. Once clear of this dismal schooner we would build a hut among the trees along the beach, or, mayhap, find a snug cave for shelter, and spend the days fishing or catching birds for food and exploring the island while keeping a look-out for passing ships.

Deep in these thoughts I hardly heard a hail to " fetch a bucket o' water forrard here, you ! "

Next moment a hard hand clutched me by the ear with a cruel wrench that nearly tore it out by the roots and swung me against the deck-house.

I turned with the blood streaming down my

cheek to find the big savage face of a pirate called Pyatt glaring down at me.

"Perhaps ye'll hear better now," he said, with a foul oath. "Get me a drink, ye whelp."

The yell of agony I gave sounded along the deck, but as I turned to do the brute's bidding a hand fell on my shoulder and John pulled me into the deck-house.

"Tie the lad's head up, Hood," he said quietly, and stepped outside again to where the big bully stood with his face crimson with rage.

Very gently he said: "Boys are about your mark, you great hulking swab. Did you ever try the taste of a man?

"Now you put a finger on that lad again and I'll put a head on you your own mother wouldn't know, d'ye hear?" and he stood with folded arms staring at the big freebooter.

I believe Pyatt would have slunk away, such a grim figure did the old seaman look with his mutilated face, but the others attracted by the noise formed a ring round them, full of ferocious glee at the idea of beholding a fight, and egged him on with encouraging cries, at which Pyatt pulled his shirt off and, pouring forth a torrent of oaths, rushed upon Anderson, swinging his great arms like flails.

I thought John's lean, long body must be overborne by the wild bull-like rush, but I didn't know the wary, agile old salt.

Swiftly ducking under the ponderous fists he rose behind him, and as the bully recovered himself and wheeled, two smashing blows on the face sent him crashing to the deck, with the blood streaming from his mouth and nostrils. Reaching a hand round to the belt at his back, and cursing like a madman, he rose to his feet.

"Look up! he's got his knife out," shouted the warning voice of Hood.

Pyatt rushed in with a snarl like a wild beast.

I saw the knife gleam in his hand, but what happened next I cannot rightly describe, it all took place so quickly.

There was a swift stoop, I heard the crack of a bone giving, the knife tinkled on the deck, and Pyatt went flying over John's shoulder to land in the scuppers, where he lay senseless with a broken wrist and collar-bone.

"That," said John, "is a throw I learned off a Cornishman; they call it 'the Flying Mare,' an' it's good for swabs as draws knives on an unarmed man." And he coolly adjusted his neckerchief while the pirates looked stupefied at the terrible throw.

"Hallo, hallo! Wot the thundering blazes is up here, eh?" cried Richards, limping up and forcing his way into the circle, looking angrily from one to another and finally at the great sprawling figure on the deck. "Is the man dead? Is this your work, Anderson? Have ye lost your tongues, ye lubbers?" he roared.

A volley of explanations followed this, while some of the pirates lifted Pyatt out of the scuppers and dashed some water in his face.

"Ho!" said Richards, after listening to the story and turning on Anderson: "that's wot's up, is it? So, my man, you've nothing better to do than shoving your oar in, interfering and laying a man out because a pup of a ship's boy gets his ear pulled for not doing as he's bid, eh?"

There were some angry growls from the crew at this, and it was evident our friends among them were precious scarce.

"So that's how the land lays, is it?" said the gunner. "Aft, one of ye, for the cap'n. Split me, but we'll hear wot he's got to say about it."

I believe Parry had been watching the whole affair, for as one of the men turned to fetch him he stepped quietly into the circle.

Tapping his snuff-box with one white knuckle he took a dainty pinch, and having dusted his nose with a snowy kerchief turned to Richards, saying, in his soft smooth way :

" What's the trouble here, Richards ? "

" The trouble is this," snorted the gunner. " Here we are short-handed and Anderson there, he goes and lays a man out—one o' the best hands aboard the ship—all along o' that young cub not doing wot he's bid."

Putting his hands behind his back the captain turned an inquiring face on Anderson.

" All I have to say is this," said John. " I saw the lad didn't hear Pyatt, and Pyatt, without any more to do, ups an' half tore the ear off the lad's head, and then he drew a knife on me.

" I take the whole blame o' this. The lad, as all this crew knows, saved me from getting a knife in the back the night we put to sea from Port Royal, and I'm going to stand by him an' stop that sort o' thing if there's any sort o' fair play aboord this schooner, as long as I've a breath to draw."

" As long as you have a breath to draw. Ah ! and how long might that be, think ye ? " said Parry, with a deadly smile.

"I'll tow ye astern for shark bait," said he; "seize the dog some of ye, and lash him up!"

Half a dozen pirates threw themselves upon Anderson, but he tore himself free, and before any one could realise his intention ran along the deck, swung himself on to the rail, and sprang into the sea.

Parry shouted on the pirates to fire on him, but they were dumbfoundered for a moment, and before they could load a musket Anderson was half-way to the beach. Even when they did begin to fire he dived every few strokes, and though a few bullets cut the water near him he scrambled ashore unhurt, and waving his arm in derision disappeared among the trees and bushes that fringed the beach.

Richards was for lowering the dinghy and hunting him down, but Parry said, "No, he has neither food nor weapons; let him die and rot there!"

"Into the deck-house and lay low, Ned!" said Hood, pushing me back from the door, where I had stood breathlessly watching Anderson swim ashore.

"By the Lord, this has upset the plan, an' there's no telling wot's goin' to happen. If ever

seamen needed fair winds and good luck, it's us this blessed minute."

I sat back in the deck-house out of sight. Hood lit a pipe, and sat with his bulky frame filling one of the open doors, looking very cool and easy. But I knew both of us felt like being shut up in a dark room expecting a blow, and not knowing where it was coming from or how to guard against it.

The buccaneers were all gathered aft deep in consultation.

"This looks like as if we were precious near the rocks, Ned," said Hood, "an' yet I don't know. Listen now, my lad, for we haven't much time to make our minds up. They're all deep in a palaver aft there, an' wot's going to be the upshot of it I don't know. If they leave us alone, well an' good, we'll keep quiet an' stand by for night; anything may happen afore we're many minutes older, but every minute counts for us. It'll be dark in a jiffy. If they come at us I'll stave them off with talk as long as I can, an' see this"—he lifted a heavy broad-bladed meat axe—"when I clear the way, take a long dive over the side."

After what seemed an age, but in reality was

some ten minutes, the buccaneers came to some conclusion.

Whatever this was, it made them all very merry. They broke up and tramped along the deck to the fo'c'sle, laughing as they went by the deck-house, and all staring hard at Hood, who had got up and was apparently very busy among his pots and pans.

We breathed a little easier after they had all passed.

A spare topgallant sail had been rigged up from the break of the fo'c'sle to the fore-shrouds for shelter from the sun through the day and the heavy dew at night, and under this they sat round the combing of the fore-hatch and began card-playing again.

A young freebooter called Barker passed towards the fo'c'sle carrying a bucketful of rum and a net of lemons, and came back in a minute for some drinking mugs. The cook jumped up to get them off the hooks; as he collected them, he said:

"How goes it, Jim? The hands mean having a blow-out to-night, eh? Wot are they saying about old Anderson and the way he has given us all leg-bail?"

"They say he's a thundering good swim-

mer," said Barker. "Can you and that boy swim?"

"We are both crack swimmers, Jim!"

Then, said Barker, looking at us in a strange warning manner:

"Take one before the rum gets to work!"

"Thankee, Jim," said Hood quietly, as Barker took the cups and went out. "You're a good lad in a way, and we'll not forget wot you tell us.

"You heard wot was said there just now, Ned?"

I nodded.

"Well, it means there's death afore us, no less, if we don't give 'em the slip to-night, an' that before the drink gets warmin' them up; so we must get ready."

The moment it was dark Hood slipped along to the galley and came back with some bundles.

"Harkee, Ned. John and I planned that we three should go ashore to-night afore the rumpus came along to upset things, an' we have bin making ready. Now, how far can ye swim?"

"I can swim half a mile easy!" said I.

"Then," said Hood, "ye can swim to the beach yonder wi' a little load I'll lash on to your back!"

"Swift now, knot that shot-bag and powder-flask together; that goes round your neck so. It's lucky we have that old fowling-piece in here; I'll carry that. Slip your shoes off, stow whatever ye think may come in handy in your pockets. This keg, now, that I've headed up and greased all over, I'm goin' to lower over the side; if we get away without being seen I'll shove it along; if not, the tide's making, perhaps it will drift ashore."

Hood looked out of the door. The pirates had a ship's lantern on the fore-hatch, around which they were seated drinking and gambling, but all the rest of the deck was in darkness.

Thanks to the rum, there was a good deal of noisy laughing and cursing already over the cards, so Hood, bidding me get ready, lifted the keg, and we crept across the deck.

He took a few coils of rope off a belaying-pin, and making a slip-knot round the keg lowered it softly into the sea. While he was doing this we both got a great start, for out of the sea, beside the barrel, we could see dimly a white face glaring up at us.

A warning hush from Anderson, for it was him, reassured us.

"I'll look after this. Hurry, boys!" he whis-

"Over you go, Ned, like a ghost; I'll follow in a minute
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pered, slipping the barrel free and swimming away with it as quiet as a seal.

"Over ye go, Ned, like a ghost. I'll follow in a minute."

I slid down the rope and struck out after John, and a few minutes later we all reached the shore in safety.

"First thing," said Hood, when we had wrung the water out of our clothes, "is to have a swig at this to keep the shivers off!" And he produced a bottle of rum and a pannikin out of one of his bundles.

The strong drink warmed us up, for we were all chittering with our wet clothes and the chill night air.

Carrying everything with us, we tramped along the beach a little distance till we came to a sharp bend in the trees that hid us from the schooner. Here we passed the rest of the night drying our clothes over a little fire and keeping a sharp look-out in case they sent a boat ashore.

"Not that I'm very much afraid o' them doing anything o' the sort when ye think it over."

"How so, shipmate?" inquired Hood.

"For this good reason, they won't trust one another. All the plunder is aboard. If they

send a boat's crew ashore they well know Parry is equal to slipping his cable while we are being run down. The less men, the more booty for them that's left. Likewise there's plenty aboard that would be glad to do the same by Parry if he left the schooner!"

CHAPTER X

THE ISLAND

ANDERSON'S reasoning proved correct.

With the first streaks of dawn we heard the clank, clank of the windlass and the cries of the freebooters as they made sail.

For a long while we stood watching the schooner, as sail after sail was set and she bore away to the south.

Ages seemed to have passed since with those who were so cruelly done to death I sailed past Kessock, and as she drew away and grew small in the distance I wondered when, if ever, I should see the old home again. Hood's voice roused me from these sad thoughts.

"There she goes!" he cried, shaking his fist at the schooner, "an' I'm not a vindictive sort o' cove, but if a howling, blistering gale o' wind sent her an' all aboard to the bottom o' the sea afore another watch is called I wouldn't put a band o' crape round my arm, blow me!"

"It won't need a gale o' wind to do that!" said Anderson.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean that Parry expects to make some harbour soon. No mortal craft built by the hand o' man could stand the hashing yon schooner has had these past three days. She's badly strained, and they'll have to keep the pumps going or she'll founder before the day is out!

"I sounded her well yesterday, and she was making water too fast to be safe. Of course, I'm not sure exactly where away we are; neither Hood nor I ever sighted this land afore, but Cap'n Parry'll know!"

"We've bin running sou'-east or thereabouts for the past three days and two nights," said Hood.

"That's so," said John, "and, taking it by dead reckoning, we are down among the Leeward Islands. I may be out a bit, not knowing the drift, but I shouldn't wonder if this isn't one of they bits o' islands lying nor'-west o' Margarita.

"Anyway," said he, getting up, "we had better have a look round and spy out the lay o' the land, and find a cave or rig up some sort o' shelter!"

Before starting we made an inventory of our

possessions. First and most important came the shot-gun, poor old Captain Paterson's, with the powder-flask and shot-bag, holding half a pound of powder and maybe two pounds of buckshot. Hood had stowed away in the barrel a lump of pork weighing half a stone, nine slabs of chocolate, a big lump of salt, and several pounds of biscuit and flour. Then we had an iron pot to cook with, that Hood had carried ashore full of odds and ends, and some pounds of tobacco. Besides the fowling-piece, we had for arms a pocket pistol, a long murderous-looking dirk, a small hatchet, and our gullies. That and the clothes we stood in was the total.

When we had gone over everything, said Anderson: "Matters might be worse, lads. Many's the poor sailor-man that has been marooned with naught but the clothes on his back and come safe home in the long run, when they that marooned him were dead and lying at the bottom o' the sea!

"Now our best plan," he continued, as we made bundles of the stores, "is to march along the beach here till we get abreast o' the high part of the island, and then climb to the top!"

So away we tramped along the hard white sand, John carrying the pork and biscuit, Hood

the remainder of the provisions and the bundle of clothes, while I marched with the fowling-piece, on the barrel of which was slung the kettle and the powder and shot.

After trudging along the edge of the trees for about a mile, we came to a halt by a fresh-water spring at a point close to where the land rose to its highest, and, laying the stores at the foot of a tall coco palm that we might climb more easily, we struck inland and commenced the ascent.

As we climbed on we soon left the trees and came in a dense growth of bushes, very difficult to make way through. Terrible hard work it was to go further, what with the heat and the bad footing. But we stuck to it, and by and by we left the scrub behind, and after that it was all plain sailing, nothing but grass clear to the top.

In fifteen minutes we gained the summit, breathless, and dripping with perspiration. Stretching ourselves along the grass, we looked around and drank deep gulps of the sweet sea breeze.

The island sloped on all hands from where we lay to the sea. It was in length about three miles, and not more than half a mile across at its widest part. The eastern extremity near where we

came ashore terminated in a point, and at low water a spit of sand showed for half a mile out to sea. The western end narrowed to a round bump or headland completely overgrown with trees. The whole, taking away the trees and bush, reminding me somewhat of the Islet of Inchkeith, which lies in the Forth off the port of Leith.

Away to the south-east the schooner was still plain in sight, and likely to be for some time, as the breeze was dying away.

"We're about four hundred feet above the sea here," said John, "and we'll have to see about rigging up a mast and flag in case of passing ships, although I'm afraid we're out o' the usual run o' them. But there's no fear o' us starving; plenty birds and fruit, and we'll make a shift to catch some fish by way o' change in the grub!"

"Talking o' grub," said Hood, "reminds me it's about time we had something to eat now, for my belly's beginning to think my throat's cut!

"Supposing we get down again and set about something o' that sort, bit o' boiled pork an' biscuit, and find some sort of shelter. It won't do to sleep in the open in these parts, or first thing, ye know, some o' us'll be down wi' fever.

That's a spring o' good water by the tree down there."

Descending again through the scrub and trees to where we left the stores, Hood soon had a fire blazing, over which he boiled some pork, and, when that was cooked, scoured the pot out and boiled the chocolate; and all being now fairly sharp set we made a lusty meal, using big shallow sea-shells for drinking out of.

After dinner we loaded up again and marched along, still towards the western end of the island. The food had put new life into us. The lovely beach stretched in front, edged with palm and a thousand flowering shrubs and creepers rustling in the gentle breeze. The bright sunshine flashing on the huge combers that came sailing majestically shorewards, to finally curl over and crash with a thunderous roar into a stretch of snowy foam, the sea-birds screaming and swooping among the wave-tops, all made up a scene so bright and joyous as must have cheered the saddest heart. I danced along in the wake of my companions in misfortune thinking matters might be worse. I might be laying out dishes of meat for Captain Parry in that murderous cabin where the old captain's blood stained the planks.

Among the sea-birds were plenty of a kind of duck, and waders by the score. So I asked John,

who was carrying the fowling-piece, to let me try a shot at them.

He handed the gun over with an injunction to be careful.

"No wasting o' powder and shot, my lad. We'll have to depend on it for fresh meat, and when it's done, the Lord only knows where we'll get more. We'll have to trap birds!

"There's a charge in her, and Hood an' I'll halt and smoke till we hear from ye."

Striking into the bushes, I made a circuit among the trees, intending to get abreast of a little sand bar that ran out to sea about fifty yards, and along which the birds were feeding in scores. So I stole softly forward, and keeping well in among the trees came to the very edge of the sand without disturbing them. To my delight, about twenty-five yards out, there was a little pool left by the tide, and squattering and quacking about in this were a couple of score of ducks, if there was one. So I looked to the flint and priming, for I looked on that charge of buck-shot as so many diamonds, and, taking careful aim, let drive into the middle of them.

Dropping the gun, I dashed out and captured three wounded birds before they could flutter

out to sea, and five other dead birds that lay in and about the pool made eight.

"Not a bad shot, sonny!" said Hood, as John and he came up a minute later. "We'll rate you master gunner after this!"

Bonnie birds they were, and very like the blue-winged teal we shoot on the beach at the mouth of the Ness in winter.

"Ah!" says Hood, as we picked the birds up, "roast ducks is all right, but where's the stuffin', the sage an' onions, eh?

"If I 'ad some green peas and a few sprigs o' parsley, I could do you up a feed as would make you think you was back again in old England. A feed like that and a jug of October brew—ah!"

The cook shook his head as he contemplated the glories of such a feast, and said: "My lads, there ain't no word for it!"

We now crossed the ridge, and held along the north beach for another half a mile, and here we came to the edge of a little cove that ran into the land about a hundred yards. A low cliff, pierced here and there with a number of small caves, ran round the cove about twenty yards back from the line of drift and weed marking the height of the tide.

"Here's a bit of luck for a start!" cried Hood,

pointing to the caves. "A snug little cove, with shelter to sleep in and water at the front door," said he, pointing to a small spring of clear water that bubbled out of the ground and wandered in a tiny rivulet down to the sea.

It looked the very spot for a camping ground, and climbing down we began to poke among the caves in the little cliff.

Most of them were of no great depth, but one of the biggest penetrated for about seven yards. Dry and cool it was, with a roof high enough for Hood to stand upright in.

"Couldn't be better if we'd bin expected!" said Hood, as we came into the open again.

About half-way in it took a turn to the left, and as it was freely littered with driftwood and seaware left by some high tide, John and I set to work and cleared it out, while Hood busied himself making a fireplace with lumps of rock. Then we gathered great armfuls of dried grass and ferns, of which there was a great abundance among the trees and bushes that lined the edge of the little cliff, and spread them on the inner floor. A more comfortable couch maroons couldn't wish for, and by the time we had finished Hood had half the ducks hissing and spluttering merrily over a glowing red fire.

When we had finished supper it was dark,

and feeling dog-tired I left Anderson and Hood smoking by the fire, and, lying down on the sweet-smelling grass, in a minute was sound asleep, lulled by the boom of the combers breaking along the shore of the island.

CHAPTER XI

THE SCHOONER "DOLPHIN" AGAIN

I WAS aroused next morning by Hood roaring:

"Now then, my lad, ain't ye going to show a leg to-day? Here's the eggs and bacon, not forgetting the muffins all a-frizzling steaming hot, awaiting, and a lovely breeze to give ye an appetite!"

I rubbed my eyes and felt for the familiar edge of my bunk, forgetting for the moment where I was; recollecting, I jumped up and followed Hood to the mouth of the cave.

The gale had sprung up again and was now blowing hard from the south-east. For about two hundred yards out, the sea, sheltered by the island, was fairly calm, but beyond that all was leaping, grey, white-crested waves, and overhead dark masses of ragged low-hanging clouds raced madly across the sky.

"I wonder how the schooner 'Dolphin' is getting on in this 'ere blow," said Hood, dipping

out a shellful of chocolate and helping himself to another biscuit.

"If they haven't found sheltering anchorage afore this I'm doubting very much if she's afloat, and I don't see how they could have reached shelter. I'll lay a golden guinea she wasn't more than out o' sight o' this island when we turned in last night, and the gale sprung up again two hours afore dawn," said John.

"Maybe he would try and run back," said Hood.

"We had better have a dander across to the weather side, or, better still, climb up the hill an' see if anything is in sight," said John.

So we finished breakfast and helped Hood to clear away. We climbed the cliff, and keeping eastward along the sand for about a mile to avoid the highest part of the island, we turned into the trees.

Here it was a great deal easier climbing than where we made the ascent the day before, owing to the brushwood being much thinner.

It was as much as we could do to stand erect on the ridge, exposed as we were to the full fury of the blast. Though not so wild as the storm which drove us southward to the island, yet it was enough to whip the sea into a wide welter of

foaming billows and send them lashing in roaring surges along the sands below. And high up as we were I could taste the salt spindrift on my lips.

Eagerly we searched the wild scene to southward.

"Can ye make out anything?" shouted Hood to John, who peered into the gale under his bushy eyebrows.

For answer John placed one hand on Hood's shoulder, and pointed with the other into the south-east, and following his finger I could see a dim blur on the face of the waters.

"The schooner for a thousand!" roared Hood.

"No other!" cried John. "Come on, she'll strike about the east end in the shoal water."

Walking rapidly, about twenty minutes took us to the edge of the trees near the end of the island, and here John halted.

"We'll bide here," said John, restraining Hood and myself, who would have gone on to the beach. "Without a boat we can do no good if we wanted to, and if they win ashore in the cutter there'll be trouble for us sure, so it's best to watch what comes ashore from the shelter of the trees here."

"She'll take ground a long way out, if she

strikes about here," said Hood. "See how shallow the water looks!"

The wrecked schooner was plain now, even through the spray, from where we stood among the bending trees, with her foremast gone and only a stump of the mainmast left; not a rag of canvas did she show, and wholly at the mercy of the waves she plunged heavily, broadside on, shorewards.

"They'll try and launch the cutter," said John. "The chances are she'll go to pieces when she strikes. See how deep she is, half full o' water, as I told ye she'd be; and all that raffle o' spars banging about her bows'll fair jam the guts out o' her."

So here was an end of the poor old schooner, and sadly I watched her as with every send of the sea she drove nearer and nearer her doom. Sometimes the driving storm would shut her out of sight, but each time we saw her she was closer in, and we could make out a little knot of men clinging about the poop and more amidships where the cutter was stowed.

Suddenly she gave a wild stagger and stopped, and we held our breath as a sea broke clean over and hid her from sight for a moment, then another sea heaved her further in, at the same time twisting her round stern on to the beach.

"She's struck!" said John, "but the seas'll bump her in a bit further. There they go with the cutter!"

We could see the pirates lowering the cutter over the starboard side, where it would be sheltered a little.

The schooner was evidently hard and fast aground now, for all around the sea was white with the foam of waves that broke over her.

"It's a chance if the boat lives two minutes in that sea," shouted Hood.

In spite of incredible difficulties they managed to get the cutter into the water without mishap, and then we could see a wild scramble for places.

"See them fighting, the damn fools!" cried John. "There's knives and cutlasses going yonder; there goes one wi' a stab in the ribs," and as he spoke we saw a man topple backwards into the sea and could fancy the death cry.

"They'll swamp her; the whole blasted crew has got in, an' they've loaded her up with gear."

It was impossible a boat with such a load could live in that leaping sea; they had shoved her clear of the wreck, but they were too crowded to give the oars play, and up and down she heaved, now poised on the crest of a sea for an

instant, before she swooped into the hollow and was lost to sight.

A dozen times we watched her leap into sight and disappear, and then a wave or two passed on and a wild yell of despair came down the wind to us.

"By the Lord Harry, she's gone!" shouted Hood. "Look at them!"

Capsized the cutter was without a doubt, and here and there the waves were dotted with struggling swimmers.

"My God!" said John, running out on the beach, "maybe we can save one or two o' them; we canna let men drown afore our very eyes, bad and all as they are!"

"It'll be for the hangman, then!" said Hood, as we followed.

Carefully we marked each incoming wave as it broke at our feet, and the first thing that rolled in was a keg of rum.

"See!" said John, as watching their chance they caught it, before the retreating wave dragged it back, and rolled it up the beach, "they'd drown for rum!"

Next we rescued a keg of powder.

"That's better than rum," said Hood, "the powder will be good and dry in the middle."

"There's a man," I shouted, pointing to a

half-drowned pirate faintly struggling a few yards out; so we joined hands, and Hood went into the water breast high and, seizing the man by an arm, lugged him out and laid him exhausted on the sand.

Six we saved that way; but during all this I had another plan forming in my head since the capsizing of the cutter, and now set about putting it into practice.

The cutter, though capsized, I reasoned, wouldn't sink, and the wind and sea would drive her along the beach, and maybe, thinks I, she will drift ashore on the sand-bar where I shot the ducks, so here goes to look after her.

The storm, as if satisfied with its work, was abating; and every now and then a blink of stormy sunshine danced across the sea through a rift in the breaking clouds.

Leaving Anderson and Hood busy with the dead and half-drowned pirates, and the raffle of wreckage that drifted ashore, I slipped away without telling them of my intention. After running along the beach a few hundred yards, I picked out a good palm tree to see from, and swarming up to the leaves looked anxiously across the sea.

Long and carefully I searched the tumbling waters for a sign of the capsized boat, and at

last, in a blink of sunshine, caught sight of the flash of her wet side as she rose on a wave, about three hundred yards out, and whether she had capsized or not, there she was floating on an even keel, evidently half full of water.

Sliding down, I trotted along the beach, keeping my eyes open, meanwhile, for any useful wreckage. Nor was I disappointed in this, though it was hardly the kind of wreckage I had in mind.

Scarcely had I gone a hundred paces, when the sight of a body in the water—a little way out—stopped me.

"Here's one that clung to the cutter until he was washed off!" says I, and watching the wave break I ran in a few steps, and, grabbing the clothes with a great effort, hauled the body high and dry.

Picture my fright and astonishment, on turning the man over on his back, to find it was Captain Parry.

I thrust my hand inside his shirt bosom, for I give you my solemn word, if life was in him, I would have dragged him into the sea again; but no heart-beat could I feel, the face was pale as a corpse, and the white even teeth were clenched behind the blue lips in a ghastly cruel grin.

"Dead!" I muttered, with a feeling of relief. "Dead as Julius Cæsar!" I was about to draw my hand out, when I felt something hard in a pocket in the shirt, and, drawing it forth, found it was the identical case I saw him examining in his cabin, after the capture of the barque. A green leather case it was, and heavy, securely fastened, not only with a lock, but also two strong brass clasps.

I did not trouble to open it then, but thrust it in my pocket, saying, half aloud:

"Perhaps there's something inside this, Captain Parry, to pay for the schooner you pirated." Then I took a brace of pistols, beautifully inlaid with silver and ivory, that hooked from his belt, with a little powder-flask and bullet-pouch; and with one half-frightened backward glance at the body of the terrible freebooter, and another to see if the coast was clear, I sped away after the boat.

I soon caught up with it, and keeping abreast as it drifted, noted with joy it was gradually being driven inshore, and bound to drift on a little sand-bar. Another thing, the storm was spent, and wind and sea were going down as rapidly as they rose, which is the way in those latitudes.

Running on ahead, I made my way out on

the sand-bar, and waited in a perfect fever of excitement. If I could only get her away and hide her before any of the rescued pirates saw me, the three of us might make our escape.

At last she was near enough, and wading out to my waist, I managed, with a struggle, to clamber in, stepping, as I did so, on the body of a drowned pirate. He lay huddled up in the bottom of the boat, under the water, his arms clasping the seat above him, and it took all my strength to unclasp them, such a death grip had he.

Pulling him up, I heaved him on to the gunwale, and so toppled him over, with no more compunction than I would a drowned rat.

Looking about, I gave a shout of delight, for lashed along the thwarts were mast and sail, while underneath were two spare oars and the boat-hook.

Taking my cocked hat for a bailer, I bailed furiously for ten minutes, pausing once or twice to note the result in case the sea-plug had come out ; but she was water-tight. A few more spells and I had her practically emptied. Then, shipping one of the oars in the notch astern, I shut my teeth and began sculling with might and main to keep her from going ashore on the sandbank.

In all my days I never remember working so hard as I did to get that cutter around the point, she was so big and heavy. How I sweated and panted as I hove away at that oar, and the sea was a terrible hindrance, as every wave would slew her bows inshore; but I felt somehow it meant life or death to my friends and me, and I stuck to it and at last found she was clear of the end of the bar.

Slewing her round then, I sculled into the calm water in the lee of the sand-bank, and shipping the oar, sank exhausted in the stern-sheets.

In a little while, having regained my wind, and thinking there might be something in the way of food and drink in the locker, I made a lever of the boothook, and with some difficulty burst the hasp.

Dame Fortune smiled on me that day surely. The boat had evidently been provisioned by the pirates against shipwreck, for the locker was full. Tins of white biscuit, cooked beef, dried tongues, jars of preserved fruit, a keg of fine brandy, pounds of tobacco, and the water-keg full to the bung.

Ravenous with hunger, it being now long past noon, I ran some brandy into the water pannikin, and filling it up with water, drank it off and

made a good dinner off the cooked beef and biscuit.

Feeling a great deal better and stronger now, I bailed her quite dry to the foot-boards. She was too big a boat for me to handle alone, or I would have tried to step the mast and sail her along the shore; neither was there a rudder, and the oars were too big to row with, so I laid into the sculling again. Wind and tide were with me now, so I got along famously, all the time keeping my eye open for some snug, handy little cove I could hide the cutter in. But nothing of the kind I was in need of could I see, and I began to think I would have to scull her right round the west end to the caves on the north side of the island. But the luck had not given out yet. It will be remembered that the western end of the island terminated in a round, tree-clad bump or headland, and when I had come thus far the land ran in, so, slewing round, I sculled along this cove, as I thought it to be.

After sculling for a few minutes, I looked ahead and found to my surprise and delight there was a narrow channel some thirty yards wide clear through to the north side of the island. Along this I sculled slowly and carefully, keeping a sharp look-out; but the sides of the passage were perpendicular cliffs seventy feet and more high,

except in one place on the side of the little islet—as we ever afterwards called it—there the cliff was easy to climb, and half-way up it was cleft in a tiny gorge.

Gaining the end of the passage, I ran the cutter under the cliff on the eastern side, and having made her all secure and fast by digging the grapple into a hole in the rock, I clambered up to the top of the cliff, and started off along the shore at a good run for the cave. Night was coming on by this time, and I wondered what Anderson and Hood were doing.

Arrived at the little cliff, Hood's welcome voice called on me to stand.

"Who goes? Belay there, or I fire!" he cried.

"Steady!" I answered. "It's Ned!" and in another minute he had me by the hand.

"Blow me into splinters, young un; but I'm glad to clap eyes on you!" said he. "Where the blazes have you bin to? Have you seen anything o' John?"

"John!" I echoed, with a start. "No, I haven't seen him since I left you hauling the pirates out o' the water!"

"Hold there! Stand by half a jiffy, till I show a glim!"

With flint and steel he blew some dried grass into a flame, and quickly set light to a rude

torch he had made of rope yarn and tow ; this he stuck in a crevice in the wall of the cave, and making me sit down on the grass, sat down himself, saying :

" Now then, my lad, heave ahead and let's hear what you've been up to ! And where the Davy Jones did you capture Cap'n Parry's barkers ? " he cried, plucking the pistols out of my waist-band. " I'd know them in a million ! "

Beginning at where I left them rescuing the drowning men, I told him of dragging Parry's body out of the sea and rifling it of the pistols and leather case. Then I told him of my idea about the cutter, how I got her and sculled her round the point, along the shore, and through the passage, and where I had berthed her, and now said I : " What have you done, and where did you leave Anderson ? "

When I had finished, he stared at me for several moments without saying anything.

Then he rose, and drawing a deep breath, said : " This takes the wind clean out o' my sails ! I did think at times you was a bit of a duffer, and heavy about the maintop, but I take it all back and axes your 'umble pardon, blow me ! This," he continued, " knocks me into a cocked hat. You getting away with the cutter like that is a

blessing in more ways nor one. But see here, now, I never see a slant o' good luck blow that hadn't a streak of bad in it; an' now I'll tell you somethin' that'll surprise you; and we got to study out some move, for John's laid by the heels, I'll take my oath.

"It's a pity you didn't knock Parry on the head and pitch him in the sea agin, for he's no more dead than we are. He must have come round, for as I left John tending to those genelmen o' fortune—blast the hour we ever crooked a finger to save' em—to come along here with some powder and guns that came ashore, I seen a man staggering along the beach towards 'em. I'll take my oath that man were Parry, no less; an' I'll tell you what, my lad, old John has fell foul o' him, and they've got him in limbo. There's no more gratitood in them swine than there is in so many sharks, and I wish we had stove the heads in of every mother's son that come ashore!

"Now," said Hood, cutting off a quid of tobacco and putting it in his cheek, "fust thing we got to do is make ourselves scarce out o' this. If it comes to a rumpus, as I believe it will, we stand no chance here agin them. John and I fished six out o' the sea, and Parry makes seven, and Richards an' Becke are among them we saved.

"Now, you say that headland up there is an island. We'll shove off for that cutter, find some safer corner to lay up in, and have a bit of a palaver; so we'll just load up and travel as smart as ye like."

Making everything into as convenient bundles as possible, we got them up the cliff, and loading one another, we marched off, keeping well in the shadow of the trees, for in a bright tropical starlight one can see a long way, and though we anticipated no danger, we thought it best to take every precaution against surprise.

We reached the cutter without mishap, and lowering the bundles over the cliff, we clambered down.

"Now, where d'ye think we'd better make for?" asked Hood.

"Let us pull out," I suggested, "and coast round the little isle. There's almost sure to be some little cove in the rocks on the seaward side for the cutter, and there's plenty shelter for us among the trees."

So we took an oar each, and after pulling a few strokes to get into the channel, Hood stopped rowing, and pointing down the passage to the south, said he:

"Look yonder, Ned! I'm afraid this island o' yours is only an island at high water. See

the bar o' sand and shingle joining it on to the main island?"

It was as Hood said, and the most disappointing thing about it was, the neck of shingle crossed the passage exactly at the point where the cliff of the little isle was easy to climb.

We hugged the low cliff, keeping a look-out for some place to run in, and about half-way round we saw what we were after in the shape of a tiny cove between two high cliffs or rocks, with a few yards of smooth turf and sand between the water and the dense growth of trees and bushes, making a perfect natural little harbour.

"This is about our mark," said Hood, sculling through the entrance and gently beaching the cutter.

"And you say there's a sand-bar running out to sea from the south side where you got the cutter. We'll pull round there and try to find out what's o'clock. By the Davy Jones, there's no telling where this game is a-going to end!"

We took the mast and sail out of the cutter, and all the stores, everything except the oars, that would lighten her and make it easier for pulling, and carried them into the trees.

After muffling the rowlocks we pushed out to

sea again, and hugging the black shadow of the cliff, pulled softly round to the sand-bar.

From there we could see the glare of a great fire shining through the trees, near where the pirates came ashore.

"Looks as if the swabs were making themselves comfortable," said Hood, standing up and tightening his belt.

"Now I'm a-going down the beach here. You stay in the cutter, Ned, until I come back, and don't let her go aground, whatever ye do."

Taking his cutlass in his hand, he sprang on to the sand and stole softly into the trees.

The night was perfectly calm, and I could hear a twig crackle under his feet once or twice as he moved along; but in a little while all was deathly still, and I sat up in the stern, staring into the dark.

An hour must have gone by like this, when suddenly the silence was broken by a loud challenge that came from a point several hundred yards along the beach, and hard upon the cry came the report of a musket shot, and a fearful yell of mortal agony. I sat for a few minutes with my heart in my shoes, not knowing what to do, dreading that Hood had been shot or captured, and I can tell you my heart gave a jump when I

heard him call, and a moment after blunder over the bank and clamber aboard the cutter.

"Shove her off, quick, Ned, for your life," he whispered, breathing heavily. "Quietly now. Keep her in the shadow; they're close behind me."

As he spoke he paddled silently along, putting a good stretch of water between us and the sand-bar, and then rested on our oars listening to the pirates halloing to one another as they blundered in the dark among the trees.

They soon got tired of that sort of hide-and-seek game, especially, as I thought, with the fear on them of a man of Hood's giant strength crouching behind any tree ready to choke the life out of their best and strongest, and we heard their voices die away as they stumbled back to camp.

"We'll pull off home too, Ned," said Hood, dipping his oar. "There's no more to be done to-night. John is all right so far; they've got watches set, but I crawled past one of their look-outs up to the camp, and saw the old un tied fast to a tree.

"They're going to keep him until they nab us, I heard 'em say.

"Their first move to-morrow is to get the blunt off the wreck. After that we've got to stand by for squalls.

"I fell aboard one of their look-outs coming back, which is one less we shall have to fight. And here we are again all snug for to-night at least."

We moored the cutter securely, and by this time I was fit to drop with fatigue.

Seeing this, Hood said:

"You're fair done up, sonny, and we can't do anything for old John to-night; so first thing I'll put up a snack o' something to eat and drink, an' then we'll turn in and have a snooze till daybreak."

He lit a tiny fire, and boiled some water to mix the grog and cut up some slices of cold beef which we ate with biscuits, and hunger for sauce, and washed it down with the hot brandy and water.

"Now," says he, "wrap yerself up in this old coat o' mine and stretch out under this tree here —you'll be snug as laying in a hammock."

So we lay down to rest together and fell asleep wondering where John was and how it would all end.

CHAPTER XII

I FALL IN WITH GUNNER RICHARDS

THE early sun had only reached the tops of the trees above us when Hood, shaking me gently by the shoulder, said:

"Rouse yerself, sonny; we've got to be up an' doing."

A plunge in the sea by the cutter made me ready for Hood's breakfast of boiled tongue, chocolate, and biscuits, and by that time the little cove was all lit up in the bright morning sunshine.

Hood buckled on a cutlass he had taken off one of the pirates that came ashore, and thrusting the pistol in his belt, said:

"Fust thing, we'll have a look at the passage."

So we walked up the strip of turf, which gradually narrowed to a steep little gully, and ascending this, until Hood could touch either side with outstretched hand, we suddenly came to a sharp bend, and on turning this a few more

paces brought us to the edge of the cliff overlooking the bank of shingle, and we could see it would soon be high and dry again, for it was again about half ebb.

"Now, my son," said Hood, "you'll come no further just now. I'm going to wade across here, and I'll dodge along among the trees and see how the land lays regarding old John, an' if he's come to any harm by them sharks down there——"

He finished the sentence with a deep sea oath and a deadly frown of savage resolve.

"You will stand by here, Ned, and if I'm not back afore the tide covers the shingle again, you take and scull the cutter, d'ye see, round to where ye had her last night under that overhanging bit o' cliff. I'll sure be back afore the tide ebbs again in the evening."

"But supposing you are nabbed, what's to be done then?" I asked, not at all relishing the idea of being left with nothing to do but twiddle my thumbs.

"We won't suppose anything o' the sort," replied Hood. "Like as not they'll be all drunk to a man, 'ceptin' Parry and Richards. You always find them two clear-headed enough; besides, we can always bargain with them now we've got the cutter, which is something

they'd give their souls to have this blessed minute. So do as I tell you and keep out o' sight."

Clapping me on the back, he slipped down the cliff and waded across the temple bar. Climbing the opposite cliff, active as a monkey for all his size and weight, he waved his hand and disappeared among the trees.

Left to myself I went back through the gully and slowly made the circuit of the little isle. All traces of the storm of yesterday had cleared away in the night. Not a cloud flecked the clear, deep blue sky overhead, and the sea stretched away to the horizon, calm and shining.

All manner of gaudy-feathered birds flashed in and out among the tree-tops, and long strings of ducks and flocks of plover and a kind of pigeon winged their way past the mouth of the cove to their feeding places along the beach, which the ebbing tide left bare.

Sitting down in the shade of a big tree I whiled away the time drawing the golden charges out of Barry's pistols, after which I cleaned and reloaded them and stuck them back again in my waistband.

The long morning dragged wearily; I made my dinner off bread and a very pleasant fruit that grew profusely on the trees round about:

big as an apple they were, with a hard rind full of sharp sweet pulp, and very refreshing.

When I guessed it was time, I took the cutter round to the cliff and sat waiting. The afternoon wore on and still no sign of Hood, and I began to think he also was laid by the heels.

At length getting desperate and feeling that anything would be better than sitting idly in the cutter I secured her with plenty of rope to allow for the ebb, and climbing the cliff started cautiously eastward.

Moving along in the shelter of the trees and keeping a sharp look-out, halting every now and then to listen, I gained the ridge of the hill.

The trees below hid the beach, but the wreck was still there. The fore part of the schooner was nearly all under water, but she lay on an even keel and the poop stood high out of the water.

Down the hill I went until I came to the edge of the trees and bushes opposite the sand-bar, and avoiding the open beach I crept along until I came to a bend, from which I could command a view of the rest of the beach clear to the eastern end, where the pirates had been washed ashore.

Here I could see them quite plain, about three hundred yards away, lolling about on the sand in the shelter of the trees. Every now and

Where I lay sprawling, with my heart in my shoes, staring up at Richards who glared at me along the barrel of a pistol (*page* 187)

then the roar of a sea-chorus came down the wind telling me the careless, hardened ruffians were holding high revel, and I grew cold at the thought of what diabolical cruelty they were capable of when maddened with the fiery liquor which was part of the schooner's cargo.

Creeping along from tree to tree I gradually approached near enough to hear their voices quite plain as they bawled and quarrelled over the drink, but though I lay for a long time straining my eyes and waiting for some sign, nothing could I see of either Anderson or Hood.

As they appeared to be all more or less drunk I crawled still closer, and parting the bushes peered eagerly at them. Lying there wondering what on earth was to be done, an iron hand clutched me by the collar, and almost lifting me off my feet, flung me violently backwards, where I lay sprawling with my heart in my shoes staring up at Richards. He glared at me along the barrel of a pistol, his shark's mouth stretched from ear to ear in a grin of triumphant, cruel delight.

For a few moments he stood gloating over his capture, while I stared at the pistol vaguely wondering when he was going to pull the trigger.

"Splinter my old sides!" he croaked, "but

we're overhauling ye one by one; if it wos me own son, I couldn't be more pleased.

"Stand up, ye whelp!" said he, placing his hands on his hips, "and give an account of yerself. Where's Hood?" he demanded, casting a swift suspicious glance around.

"I don't know," I answered, scrambling to my feet, glad to think at any rate he hadn't fell into their clutches.

"Strike me blind! Wot's this?" he cried, jerking me roughly towards him and plucking the pistols out of my waist.

"Parry's barkers, by the Davy Jones! So it was you as went through him on the beach, eh?

"The cap'n is anxious to meet a cove about your build, my tulip. He'll be that glad to see you, he'll fall across your blessed neck and weep tears o' joy.

"Strike me blind an' stiff he will, I don't think.

"D'ye happen to have any more valuables about ye?" he suddenly asked in a fierce voice, feeling me all over from top to toe.

"No, ye haven't, eh? Well, come along, my bully boy, I'll announce ye to the company; so march ahead to the camp. And any dodgery," he added, shaking the pistol at me, "there'll be a

bullet through that thick head o' yours before ye know what's hurt ye."

Obeying his bidding I walked ahead with a sinking heart, and a shout of surprise greeted us as we came up.

From under a tree where he had been resting came Parry. His men were all dirty and drunk and unkempt, but he, despite the shipwreck, was still trim and clean as ever. His face was deathly pale and set in a moody frown, which gave place to a dark, sneering smile as he saw me.

"So ho! Master Ned," said he, "you've come back again, eh, to join the company, and we're all very pleased to see you. You didn't happen to bring our old friend Hood along. No, well, perhaps we shall be able to persuade him to give us a call later on."

Sitting down on a sea-chest that had come ashore, he rolled a tobacco leaf, which he lit, and having blown a cloud of smoke through his nostrils, said:

"Where did ye meet in with our young friend, Richards?"

Here the gunner limped up and gave him his pistols. Parry took the pistols, looked at them vastly surprised, and then at Richards, who for answer pointed to me.

Parry leaned forward, and bending a fierce look upon me, said :

" Where did you get these pistols, dog ? "

" I pulled you out of the sea, and thinking you were dead took the pistols away," I answered, trembling with cold fear.

" Ho ! You pulled me out of the sea, did ye ? Now, my lad," said he, with a grim smile, " if you don't answer me truthfully you will find that the worst job ever you did in your life.

" Is this all you took off the body ? " he demanded, holding up the pistols.

" Yes," said I, though I knew what he was driving at ; " except the bullet-pouch and powder-flask."

" Nothing else ? " he asked, looking at me as if he would read my very soul.

All this time I had been sending eager glances about for a sight of Anderson, and at last I caught sight of him bound fast to a tree a little way off.

It was also apparent that the case—which had completely slipped my memory since hiding it at the cove—contained something very valuable, so making up my mind to deny all knowledge of it until the last moment, and then bargain with it for the safety of John and myself, I boldly answered :

"No, I have nothing else belonging to you."

Raising a pistol he levelled it at my head. I suppose it would be full thirty seconds he kept those dark questioning eyes fixed on mine, but though terribly afraid, I kept my countenance and never blenched.

"I shall wait," he said at length, dropping his hand, "until we run Hood down. Some of ye have it. Anderson swears he knows nothing, now you. We shall hear what the other says when we lay athwart him, and then if ye don't own up I'll flay ye alive; you shall die by inches, begad!

"Take him away and lash him up alongside the other."

Richards led me down to the tree where John was.

"Here's an old friend o' yours, Anderson, come to pay his respects an' keep ye company."

At the sound of Richards's voice John looked up; the blood of a cut over the head had dried black on his face, which was pale beneath the tan, but his eye gleamed bright and resolute. Shaking his head sorrowfully he said:

"So they've laid you by the heels, sonny."

"Yes. I come across him wandering disconsolate among the trees, and persuaded him

to come along. You was feeling that lonely," said Richards.

"We'll fetch Hood along directly," he went on, tying my hands behind my back, and pushing me down against a tree opposite Anderson. "Then the fun'll begin.

"That's one thing about the cap'n, he's got plenty variety. There's no blooming end to his inventions for making them as he wants to pipe up.

"There!" he said, as he finished knotting the line he had lashed me to the tree with. "You couldn't wish to be better tied up than that, and we'll have Hood along to make up the party afore you're twelve hours older." And making us an ironical sea salute he limped away.

As soon as he had gone I asked John if he was badly hurt, for his face looked awful with the blood on it.

"Not much, laddie!" he replied. "Parry gave me a wipe over the head as I lay bound here!

"If that lashing is tight on ye," he said, "wriggle a bit. The line is wet and will give a little."

Richards had knotted the cord round my breast so tight that I could hardly breathe, but taking John's advice I squirmed and wrenched

until the sweat streamed down my face, and after a while, though still secure, the rope had stretched, and I felt much easier.

"John," said I, "can anybody hear us talking?"

"Not as I can see," he answered, in a low voice, looking about him. "If ye have anything to say, though, whisper it. I can hear easy. Keep your eyes and ears open for anything moving astarn o' me, and I'll do the same by you. So heave ahead gently; but fust thing tell me, have ye any word o' Hood?"

"He's alive and hearty!" said I, "and I expect he's dodging about the trees close by, on the look-out for a chance to help us."

Then I whispered the whole story of what I had done since I left him the day before—of the saving of the cutter, the harbour we found on the little isle—and his whole frame shook in a gust of noiseless laughter when he heard how I robbed Parry on the beach.

"What's in this case ye talk of?" he asked.

"I don't know!" said I; "never thought of looking, and it is locked and fastened very securely, but I stowed it away in a corner along at the cove!"

"Whatever is in it must be something very valuable, or Parry wouldn't be in such a sweat

over it. A pity, a'most, ye took it, boy. He'll burn us alive to get it back!

"However," he said, in a keen whisper, and sending a sharp glance about, "listen to me now! for it will be sunset directly, and then we'll have to knock off talking, talking of any plans, that is, in case some o' them should take a notion to creep along in the dark to listen. I'll wager that's one of Parry's moves, putting us together.

"One o' them I pulled out of the sea yesterday is a young hand, ye know him—Jim Barker?"

I nodded.

"Well, he's got some guts in him after all, and grateful. At any rate, I think he is. I got a chaw of backer from him to-day—a perfect god-send it were—and he yarned wi' me for a bit when he fetched along some meat and drink.

"He tells me they've gotten the dinghy; she drifted ashore a bit battered, but seaworthy, and they are going to bring the blunt ashore to-morrow in case another blow comes on and splinters the poop up. Ye see, they've taken some gear off her already.

"Barker's young, and not very well treated among them, and if we get a chance o' speaking to him while they are busy clearing the poop out we'll sound him.

"I know there's hardly a man amongst them fit to be trusted further than ye could heave him, but what wi' being cursed and bullied all day long, and now wrecked, he's in the devil's own blue funk. Now if we hint we got the cutter he'll bite—like a shark at a lump o' pork—at the chance o' joining in wi' us and helping to slip our moorings when the coast is clear and all hands busy at the wreck!

"At any rate, it's a chance, and about the only one I can see so far, unless Hood can get some plan working. It's a God A'mighty's blessing they don't know about the cutter, all hands think she was stove in and sunk or carried away to sea. Once Jim Barker joins us, and it comes to a fight, you'll see him go in like two men, for he'll know if he falls into their hands again after deserting, Parry'll burn him alive."

Before it grew quite dark this same Jim Barker came down to us with some broken biscuit and bits of meat and two pannikins of rum and water. He loosened our hands while we ate and drank, and tied us up again when we had finished.

"Jim, my lad," whispered John, "ye haven't got another chaw o' baccy about ye, eh?"

"Yes, 'ere you are," said Barker, cutting off a piece of plug and putting it in John's mouth;

" but don't talk, I mustn't be seen speaking to ye ! " he said, with a fearful glance over his shoulder. " I'll be crossin' the cap'n's bows if I do ! "

" Right you are, Jim, boy," said John ; " you've got a head on ye, an' a heart likewise, and don't let 'em think you're friendly by no means. Only one word more, Jim. I've got something private and particular to tell you fust chance in the morning. Some news Ned there has fetched along that will do your heart good, so stand by. Ye maybe think I'm on a lee shore, same as that old schooner, being trussed up like this, but we got the best trump in the pack up our sleeves yet, Jim ! " And John spat and blinked his eye at the man.

" All right ! " whispered Barker hoarsely, as he picked up the pannikins. " Tell me what's up in the morning when they're busy. I'll be guarding ye while they are gone ! "

Barker went away, and soon after it grew quite dark, for there is no twilight in those parts.

John and I talked for an hour or so, and we watched the fireflies flitting about in the darkness like diamonds, or listened to the hoarse murmur of talk, broken by loud oaths and bursts of laughter. Once we heard a rustle in the bushes

close by, but if they were listening they heard nothing of importance.

As the night wore on, the din became hideous as the rum got the upper hand ; quarrelling, and singing every one his song. They had lit a huge bonfire, round which they sat, or danced until they dropped, and, overcome with rum, slept where they fell.

Gradually the racket died away and all were asleep, except one or two who were sober and left on watch evidently ; and John and I painfully dozed in our uncomfortable position.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW WE ESCAPED

DAYLIGHT found John and me shivering with cold, and stiff and sore with our cramped position through the long dreary night.

Hardly had the sun risen when the stentorian voice of Richards was heard shouting :

" Rouse out, there ! Rouse out ! Now then, show a leg. Are ye going to sleep here all the blasted day, ye dogs ? " And oaths and cries of pain filled the air as Becke and he went among the men dealing out kicks and cuffs.

In a few minutes every man was on his feet, dirty and bleared with the effects of the night's debauch, and the first thing they did was to gather round the rum cask, while Becke served them out with a tinful each.

Then some raked the ashes of the fire together and set about making breakfast, and in a little while we saw Parry come from among the trees ; clean-shaven, and spruce as ever. I believe the man would have made a dandy of himself if he

were alone on a rock in the middle of the sea with naught but the gulls to look at him.

I ached that much with cramp and stiffness I called to him in desperation, asking if we could stand up.

He paid no attention to my cry, but when Barker and another man came with some breakfast for us they cast loose the lashings and bound us again, but standing, after we had finished the meal of broken meat, biscuit, and chocolate.

I found that Hood had made a mistake in the number of pirates saved, for as they sat eating breakfast I could count nine including Parry, so two more must have come ashore; and my heart sank as I thought what could we three do against those terrible odds if it came to a fight. But I looked at John's grim, brave old face and I heartened up and watched what was going on before me.

"They're going after the doubloons now!" said John. "See, they are getting the boat ready. It's while they are aboard the wreck clearing her out our chance will come. So God send Barker or Hood stands by us."

When all was ready, Parry, Richards, and Becke, with four others, got into the dinghy, to our intense relief leaving Barker and another

ashore with strict orders to shoot us dead if Hood should attempt a rescue. Richards threatened to cut Barker's liver out and stuff it down his gullet if he so much as allowed one of us to blink an eyelid, with which bloodthirsty threat they pulled away to the wreck lying about four hundred yards out.

Barker paced to and fro in front of us carrying a loaded musket over his shoulder, and the other man—evidently the new cook—busied himself about the fire, getting the dinner under weigh, we supposed.

In a little while he moved down to the water's edge and began to scour his pots out with sand and water, and Barker, who had halted to lean on his musket, looked first at the cook then after the dinghy, and said in a low tone without turning his head :

" Now then, John, what about that good news you was telling me of last night ? "

Keeping his eye on the cook, John spoke in a steady, low whisper.

" Jim, my boy," said he, " what I got to say can be said quick and easy, but I'm trusting you with our lives, lad, and I got to go careful. Now, Jim, I put it to you as a seaman wi' his head screwed on the right way. Is this ship's

crew in a tight corner, or is it not?—is it on its beam ends, eh?"

"Aye! aye! that's about the looks of it, I reckon!" answered Barker, shaking his head mournfully.

"Now how do you suppose," said John, "you're all going to get off this island without a boat, or anything fit to put to sea in, eh?"

"Why, keep a look-out for passing craft, and signal, I reckon," said Barker.

"Oh, indeed, that's your way is it? And supposing that passing craft should happen to be a man-o'-war—what then? No yarn this crowd can pitch will go down; you're too smart a lad not to be aware o' that, I know. And supposing it's a Don that you signal? Why, Jim, my lad, if the cap'n o' the 'Sea Horse' sent word ashore about the barque, which I expect he did, a description o' the schooner and her crew, Parry and all, will be flying all down the West Indies like wildfire this blessed minute, from Trinidad to Cuba, and the only passage this crowd'll get from them, will be one in irons to Havana. That you may bet your sweet life on."

Barker fidgeted with his musket, and said: "Of course, I expect you're right, come to think of it, but I should like to know how the blazes

we are to get away then. Wot's your good news? I haven't heard it yet."

"Help us to give them the slip and join in wi' us. And—Jim, ye never knew old John Anderson to go adrift from his word. I'll save your neck, my lad; it's in more dangers than one. You have a dog's life among them, and Richards would think no more o' slipping his knife between your ribs for your share o' the blunt than he would o' drinking a wet o' rum; and the rest would stand by and laugh. I know this crush; I've bin with them longer than you. And, Jim, you're too good a lad to stay wi' this gang o' common pirates and cut-throats. Mind, they all swing sooner or later.

"Come now, what d'ye say, Jim?"

"That's all very well, and I suppose most of what ye say is true, but how are ye going to save my bacon, let alone your own? Supposing I did jine in wi' ye, wot then? Where could we go to?

"Three men and a boy badly armed, against Parry and the others, wi' muskets, cutlasses, pistols, and powder and lead, any amount. Why, they'd have us in a brace o' shakes on a little island like this 'ere, and I'd be lucky to have a pistol by me to blow my bloomin' brains out."

"But, Jim, thinking of all I told ye just now, and to that I add, I'll show ye a sure way o' getting clear of them, what d'ye say?" whispered John.

"I say show me that, and I'm with ye to the last gasp!" said Barker.

"Jim!" said John. "You're a Catholic; kiss the cross o' that knife of yours, and give me your oath not to blow on us, and I'll tell you, for if ye don't join, there's other ways we've got."

Barker drew the knife out of its sheath, and pressing the hilt to his lips, swore:

"Show me a way to get clear o' this crew, and I swear—God strike me dead if I don't—to stand by ye and help ye all I can."

"Good, my lad, you'll never be sorry for them words.

"Jim, we've got the cutter!"

"The cutter!" said Barker, almost dropping his musket.

"Hush!" whispered John, "be careful. Aye, the cutter, oars, mast and sail, as tight as when we sailed to meet Parry; and fit to sail across the Altantic this blessed minute."

"Look out!" I whispered, "the cook is coming back."

He came back to the fire; and Barker, shoulder-

ing his musket in a little, began to pace up and down again, and John and I turned our attention to the wreck.

"Here comes the first cargo," said John, as the dinghy left the wreck and was rowed rapidly to the beach. Two men pulled, while Richards sat at the tiller. A few minutes and her stern bumped lightly on the sand.

"Here, you two," cried Richards to Barker and the cook, "help along with these chests—lively now!"

They ran down to the boat, and helped to carry the chests of money up the beach.

John turned his head, and whispered:

"Barker's ours, as sure as gun's iron. That's five trips to get the blunt ashore alone; if we don't get a chance afore they've finished, I'll eat my hat.

"If we could only grab a musket or two!" said John, eyeing the musket Barker had laid down to go and help at the dinghy.

The boat had pushed off again, when I heard John chuckle and say: "Good! by the living jingo, that's a smart lad!"

"What's up now?" I asked eagerly, seeing John's face screwed up in a tremendous grin.

"Look at Barker! Can ye no see his game? Yonder he's coming back to stand guard over

us, and he's bringing another musket; that's two we'll have!"

"Well done, Jimmy, lad!" said John, as Barker came up with his tongue in his cheek, "I see your move, and that's a head ye have on your shoulders!"

"I'll have another, or a couple, next time I go back!" said Barker.

"Aye, aye, Jim; and, man, d'ye think you could grab another powder-flask and some bullets?

"Wi' a musket apiece and a few more charges, we have a snug little cove we could hold against them all easy!"

"Leave it to me, we'll 'ave powder and lead in plenty," said Barker, who, now that he had joined us, was a new man. His eye shone brighter, and he paced in front of us with the jaunty air of a man who had a new and good purpose he could see his way to carrying through.

"There's a dozen flasks and bullet pouches somewhere around that they fetched ashore yesterday along wi' the muskets, if I can only lay my hands on them!"

You may be sure this was all meat and drink to John and I, and as our prospects of escape took on a more rosy hue, our spirits rose.

"Will ye cut us loose the next time they pull off, Jim?" asked John.

"Yes! but wot's your plan? We'll have to move smartly!"

"Right you are, my lad, and if you'll take your orders from me, I'll tell ye how to do!" whispered John.

"Steady a little," said Barker, "the cook's looking this way!"

"Barker!" he hailed, "give a look to this pot in a little, and see it don't boil over, will ye? I'll have to cut some more wood up, or there won't be any dinner!"

"Right ho! I'll see to it!" cried Barker.

Swinging an axe over his shoulder, the cook marched into the trees, and the crash of wood under his blows told us he was busy, and we had nothing to fear from him listening.

"Here's what ye got to do, Jim!" said John.

"I'm listening!" said Barker.

"When the dinghy puts off for the wreck, next time, you just take a walk into the bushes behind us. Nobody will know but what you're having a look round to see if the coast's clear o' Hood. Watch your chance then, and creep up to us on your hands and knees, the bushes will hide ye, then cut us free, and leave me your knife. We'll remain standing against the trees

as if still fast, until the time comes, and that will be when the boat reaches the wreck again."

"Aye, aye!" said Barker, "that looks a precious good move, when she's back at the schooner, and they're busy loading the stuff into her."

"Yes!" said John. "Then we cross through the trees to the north beach, and follow Ned, here, as fast as our heels can take us to the other end of the island."

"Right you are; I see! And now hold hard. I'll go and have a look at his pot!" said Barker, winking his eye.

Walking down to the fire, he lifted the lid off the pot, appeared to examine the contents, and then replacing the lid, came back by way of the heap of stores that lay against the trees.

Here he lingered for a moment looking sharply about him, and when he came back, shook his head, saying:

"They must 'ave got them stowed away somewheres. I only see one powder-flask and one bullet-pouch."

"Well! well! lad," said John, "we'll just have to be doing wi' what we've got. If we get away wi' three muskets, the powder-flask and bullet-pouch down there, and your own, we'll do not so bad, so stand by to shove off!"

"Here she comes again!" said Barker, as the dinghy left the schooner with the second load.

"I'll have another look round for more powder and shot when I go down to help."

When the dinghy was close in, he laid his musket down, and hailing the cook, walked away to meet her.

"Pass along a wet o' that rum!" cried Richards. "This boat's crew is as dry as the bully boys on Execution Dock."

We heard them all laugh at the gunner's ghastly joke as they drank the rum, and pulled away again leaving three more money chests on the sand.

The cook, after inspecting his pots, went back to wood-cutting again, and John stamped his foot and chuckled to see Barker pick up another musket, and the powder and bullets.

"It's no use, John," he said hoarsely. "I can't find any more powder and shot."

"Never mind then, lad, now's your time; into the wood wi' ye!"

Barker, with a look at the dinghy, shouldered his musket, and after a few turns up and down walked very deliberately into the trees.

"Brace yourself together, Ned, we'll be running for our lives in three minutes!" said John.

I could hear my heart thumping against my ribs with excitement. It felt like being the hare in the game of hounds and hares we play at home, only the penalty was torture and death if we were caught in this game.

Every moment was precious now; the dinghy had reached the schooner, in fifteen minutes more she would be speeding shorewards again.

The cook came staggering to the fire with a load of sticks, and, throwing it on the sand, sat down with his back to us.

I heard the bushes rustle behind us, and rip went Barker's knife on the cords that bound me.

"Be cautious, Ned, lad!" whispered John. "Keep your hands behind ye till I give the word."

I caught the flash of the knife as Barker's arm reached out from the bushes behind John, and a few slashes set him free.

"Now, lad, drop your own powder-flask and bullet-pouch—Ned here will pick them up—and go back for the others, quick but cautious. I'll take the two muskets!"

Barker came out of the trees and, coolly walking down to the stores, picked up the sling on which were hung the flask and bullet-pouch, and throwing them over his shoulders, sauntered back without the cook taking any notice.

I should like to have seen that man's face when he did look round.

"Hurry, lad, hurry!" whispered John, as Barker drew near. "They'll be shoving off again in a minute.

"Are ye ready, Ned?"

"Yes!" said I, all of a quiver to be off.

"Ready, Jim?"

"Aye, aye!"

"Then round the trees wi' ye quiet as a shadow! for your lives."

With a bound John caught up the two muskets, I grabbed the powder and bullets, and in a flash we were off running for dear life through the trees.

We had scarcely gone fifty yards before they missed us. A yell from the cook gave the alarm, which was quickly answered from the boat.

"Make for the beach!" cried John. "We'll run better on the sand."

Swerving to the right, in a few moments we cleared the trees, and the hard white sand stretched before us. Behind we could hear the pirates shouting to one another, but now a new factor appeared on the scene; a tall burly figure sprang out of the trees ahead, and Hood hailed us with an encouraging shout.

"Come along, my bully boys!" he cried, as we came up. "Hand them there guns over here, John!" he cried, taking the muskets and slinging them over his shoulder. "And don't speak; save yer wind for running as far as the cutter.

"Thunder! They haven't been long," he muttered, as a savage yell rang out behind us. "They all piled into the dinghy when they missed ye. I was watching the schooner.

"Blast them, ain't they savage?"

Throwing a hurried glance over my shoulder I saw a number of figures burst out of the wood, several hundred yards behind, and catching sight of us take up the pursuit with howls of rage. A musket cracked, and the ball hummed over our heads.

"There they go!" said Hood. "Keep close into the trees and run behind one another, or one of us'll be getting winged.

"A few more minutes and we're safe," he said cheerily, but with an anxious look at Anderson, whose breath was coming in quick hard pants.

We were now long past the little cove where we passed the first night, but the pace was beginning to tell on us all, and the day was calm and very hot, but fear nerved us.

"One more burst and we're safe, lads!" cried Hood.

Another musket cracked, this time much closer, and looking back I saw the long slim figure of Parry himself bounding after us. He had left the others behind in the race, and was scarcely a hundred yards away.

"It's the captain!" I gasped in terror.

"I'll see if I can't stop his blasted way," growled Hood, unslinging a musket and shaking up the priming as he ran.

Stopping for an instant, he wheeled and fired, but the captain was too quick for him and sprang aside into the trees. A yell of derision broke on our ears.

"I might have saved my powder and shot," panted Hood, catching us up.

"Aye, laugh, ye dogs! ye'll laugh on the other side of yer mugs directly. They're quite sure they've got us."

At length, fit to drop, we reached the cliff and half scrambled, half fell into the cutter. Hood tore the grapple out of the rock and pushed off.

"Out with an oar there, Barker; lively, my lad. They'll go slow for a minute, thinking the way we've slipped out o' sight is a trap."

Stopping for an instant, he wheeled and fired, but the Captain was too quick for him and sprang aside into the trees (*page 212*)

"Take Barker's musket, Ned," gasped John. "I'll take that one, Hood, and we'll be ready for a crack at them, when they show up.

"Glory be, we're aboard; another fifty yards would have done me," he panted. "I'm wake wi' the blood out o' this cut on the head I've to thank Parry for."

Fiercely Hood and Barker tugged at the oars, but the cutter was a great heavy boat, and we hadn't gone fifty yards when Parry, at the head of three or four men, appeared on the edge of the cliff.

The sight of the cutter struck them dumb with amazement, and for a moment they stared at us open-mouthed.

Parry was the first to recover himself. Hastily snatching a musket from one of the men he levelled it and fired. The bullet cut the water under our stern; at the same moment we fired.

A yell of pain told us one shot had taken effect, whether it was John's or mine I could not say, but they all dived into the bushes, and when the smoke trailed away not a man was to be seen.

They now began firing at us from the bushes, and the bullets spat in the water all around, but owing to their excitement and the hard run

they fired wildly. Before they had time to re-load we rounded the cliff with a triumphant yell, and for a time were out of danger, the only damage being a chip out of Barker's oar blade.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PARLEY

We ran the cutter up the little beach and at once climbed up to the edge of the cliff, where we could overlook the passage and yet remain concealed from view.

"Here's as snug a little harbour as ever I clapped eyes on," said John; and as we lay and watched the other side, Hood explained the position of the island and how the shores of it was a sheer cliff, with the exception of the cove and the place it could be climbed from the bar of sand and shingle at low water.

"Well," said he, "the tide's up around, and we'll not be bothered for a while, so out wi' some grub, Hood. Ned and I's fair famished. And while we're having a bite and a sup o' something we'll hold a council o' war and plan how we can get to windward o' that crew."

"An' to think," said Hood, after we had told him how we had fared with Parry and his men, and how Barker had come to the rescue, "An'

to think I was comin' very nigh busting up the whole plan. Half a dozen times I was as near as a toucher slipping my gully into your ribs, my lad, only I didn't know whether old John here wasn't badly knocked about and couldn't run.

"An' here's my respec's, shipmate, and good luck," said Hood gravely, drinking to Barker.

"I've bin standing off an' on that blessed camp waiting for a chance ever since yesterday afternoon, when I discovered as a certain member o' this crew had disobeyed orders an' deserted his post." And Hood wagged his head sternly at me.

"Well, well. Everything is all shipshape now; and if agreeable, my lads, we'll have a look round and take the bearings of this little isle," said John, getting up.

Re-loading the muskets I shouldered the fowling-piece, and Hood led the way to the cleft in the rock, and pointed out the place where the sand was uncovered at low water. Then we made the round of the little isle, but all was still on the other side, and we came back to the gorge again.

"Lend us your tinder-box," said John, seating

himself on the grass with his back against the cliff.

"They took mine away," he added. "Fetch up alongside while we consider."

Lighting his pipe John took half a dozen quick draws to set it going well.

"In the first place we are cornered here, and we've got to defend this little isle for our lives."

"Why not shove off to sea at once?" asked Barker. "There must be land not far off down to the south'ard."

"Barker, my lad," said John gravely, "I made up my mind a little while back there was the makings of a pretty smart seaman about you. Don't go spiling that idea. First, have you any notion where away this island is?

"No? No more have I, nor any of us here. The nearest land may be fifty mile away an' it may be five hundred.

"The cutter has to be well provisioned, if I know anything about going to sea in an open boat; but more than anything else this minute, where's yer wind. There isn't wind enough to raise a cat's-paw. They've got their eyes open, and if we put to sea now they'd be after us in the dinghy afore you could say spike.

"No, my lads, here we are and here we stick

like limpets till the boat's ready and we have a fair wind.

"So here's how things stand. There's nine o' them."

"Eight," I put in. "Either you or I hit one from the cutter."

"Right you are, my lad, but we don't know if he was badly hit, so we'll say nine, all well armed."

"Yes, four or five muskets apiece, not to mention pistols, pikes, and cutlasses, besides powder and lead by the ton," said Barker.

"Never mind," said John. "We've got, let's see, three muskets, a pistol, the shot-gun, and say a dozen shots apiece.

"Hood and Barker has cutlasses apiece, here's a dirk as good, and the boat-hook, which is a pretty handy pike, and we've got the position.

"By thunder, things might be lots worse!"

"We're only weak one way. They've got the dinghy, and that lets them come at us from the sea."

So they set to work rigging up a barricade of fallen trees in the throat of the little gorge.

"Ned," said John, "while we three are busy lugging these trees down, we need a look-out, so

take a musket and get up on the cliff there where it overlooks the channel, and keep your eye open for any move on the other side."

Slinging the musket, I clambered up and crept along the cliff until I came to a place where it jutted out a little, and by lying along this I could command the passage from end to end, and the cliff being higher than the opposite one it would be difficult for any one to see me from there.

Up and down the passage I kept a roving eye, scanning the bushes for any sign of the enemy, but never a move.

All was still as the grave; not a leaf stirred, and even the birds were hushed in the shade from the quivering afternoon heat.

I cut up some tobacco and smoked a pipe to keep the mosquitoes away, and lay smoking and watching the afternoon wear on.

The western sun began to slant its rays through the trees behind, and I wondered whether they would attack us through the night. A low whistle sounded from the trees a few yards down. Crawling back I answered, and Barker came up.

"There ain't no sign o' anything, young un?" said he.

"No," I replied, "there's nothing stirring so far."

"All right, leave the musket; I've come to relieve ye, so trot along and get your supper. I've had mine.

"It's the last I'll ever have, I think."

"Why, what makes you think that?" I asked, wondering at his low spirits.

"I dunno," he said, looking about him with a hopeless air. "But somehow I feel as if I wos to leave my bones on this blasted island. But if I does," he cried, shaking the musket savagely at the other side, "I'll have company; I'll put one or two out o' mess afore I'm done with.

"There," he said quietly, drawing a deep breath, "off ye go, sonny, they're waiting on ye!"

I showed him where I kept watch, and bidding him cheer up, at which he shook his head mournfully, walked back to the cove.

At the top of the ravine they had built a great barricade of trees, a few yards back from where it took the bend, so that if the pirates did scale the rock, they would find themselves in a trap.

"Come along, Ned, ye'll be hungered," said John, as I reached the fire.

"It's a rope's ending he ought to have instead

o' supper. I haven't forgiven ye yet, ye blooming little deserter," said Hood, shaking his great fist at me.

" Never mind, he got the cutter—didn't ye, lad ? And where the Davy Jones would we be without it ? " said John, clapping me on the shoulder. " And that case ye took off Parry that he's in such a sweat about. Get it out and let's have a look."

The excitement of the past day had again driven the case out of my thoughts ; but at the word I eagerly jumped up and ran to the bushes where it lay hidden, and bringing it back, placed it in John's hands.

" There wasn't any key, eh ? " said he, turning it over.

" Bust it open," said Hood. " I reckon it's what's inside they'll be cutting our throats for."

Full of curiosity, we bent over John while he broke the clasps and prised it open with his gully.

But none of us expected to see anything half so beautiful as the dazzling blaze of light and colour that met our eyes and made us gasp with astonishment as John forced the lid wide open.

Lying in a bed of snowy white wool was a heavy

necklace, or rather collar, such as might have been worn by the Queen of England.

It was made up of three fine, curiously worked gold chains all joined together by three jewelled bars of the same metal, and the broad clasps at the ends. Along the upper chain was strung ten of the largest and purest pearls I have ever seen. The middle chain was studded with the same number of enormous rubies, each about the size of a small hazel nut, and from the lower hung twelve stones alternately strung, six emeralds, and six diamonds, and a pendant composed of a cluster of emeralds, in the centre of which blazed one great diamond.

Nor was that all, for in a little box at one end of the case lay a double handful of unset stones—diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, all flashing and glowing in the rays of the setting sun, the loveliest sight I have ever looked upon.

"Great Davy Jones!" gasped Hood. "Are them di'mon's and things real?"

"That I canna tell ye, lad, not being in the habit o' handling joolery, but I wouldn't mind laying ye any odds they're worth more, is them gimcracks, than all the doubloons we took out of the Spaniard. And Parry knows that, and as he feels sure some of us have got it, you can bet

your lives he would cut a thousand throats to get them back, not to mention the cutter," said John.

Closing the case, he handed it back to me, saying :

" Hide them away again, Ned. I'd give them all for a good breeze this minute. The Lord above us only knows what blood and tears is on that truck !

" Now ! " said John, lighting his pipe with a burning stick. " As regards Cap'n Parry and his lambs, to my way o' thinking—as there's nothing on the move at present—here's how the game stands :

" Knowing we won't risk moving out o' this till a breeze comes along, he's set a watch on us and gone back to get the rest o' the blunt ashore in case of a break in the weather, and that'll keep them busy for the rest of the day. When they've finished that job, look out ! This little spot is going to see some warm work.

" I reckon they'll wait for daylight, though, not knowing how we are berthed ; but we'll keep watch on watch through the night in case of surprise."

So all night long we took turn about—John and Barker, and Hood and I—doing sentry, one

keeping guard at the cliff, the other perched on the rock overlooking the entrance to the cove, in case of an attack from the sea ; but the night passed without an alarm, and I sighed with relief and thanked my Maker when the dawn came, for it was eerie work watching there in the darkness. A plunge in the sea refreshed us all, and when Hood called us to breakfast in turns, we had a plentiful meal of pickles, dried tongue, chocolate, and biscuit, without being disturbed, which was lucky, for had we been half an hour later, there would have been no breakfast for us that day.

We had only finished when a hail from the main island brought us to our feet. Barker, who had been watching at the cliff, came to the edge of the trees and waved his hand in direction of the passage.

" Here's a parley. They'll be trying to bargain with us first, seeing how well we are placed. Take the cliff there, Hood, and look out for the dinghy. They're sure to divide forces and attack fore and aft. I'll go and hear what they've got to say."

" Be careful how you show yourself," said Hood. " They're sharks to a man."

" Trust me for that. Ned, you take a musket

and get up wi' Barker along the cliff there, and if ye see any signs o' treachery, give a hail, and let drive at 'em."

Away we went to our posts, while John leisurely ascended the slope to the ravine. Without so much as stirring a leaf I crawled cautiously out upon the jut and looked over.

A little way further down on the opposite side stood Parry, in plain view, unarmed, fluttering a white handkerchief in one hand, and quietly smoking a rolled tobacco leaf. Not another soul was in sight, so making a rest of a stout twig for the barrel of my musket, and aiming straight for his heart, I lay with my finger on the trigger, watching and waiting.

Becoming impatient, he hailed again: "Hello there! Hello, Anderson!" he shouted.

"Aye! Aye! Cap'n Parry!" came John's answering hail from the mouth of the cleft below. "What's your business wi' me?" he cried, putting his head round the corner. "And remember there's a couple o' muskets trained on ye this blessed minute, so look out if you raise a hand!"

Parry looked swiftly up and down, and said: "No treachery is intended, or I wouldn't be here as you see me, alone and unarmed. I give

you my word I am here to try and come to a friendly agreement."

" That for your word ! " said John, spitting into the passage. " I wouldn't trust ye further than I could heave ye, for if ever there was a dark, bloody, treacherous dog, it's you, Cap'n Parry. But say on, let's hear your bargain."

I could see the pirate's long fingers open and shut with rage, but his face still wore a pleasant smile.

" Very well, my man," he cried. " Listen, and let all of you over there weigh well my words.

" You have a green case in your possession ; it was stolen from me as I lay on the beach. Hand that over with the contents, along with the cutter, and I will give you in return the dinghy, a case of doubloons each, and lay out a course that will enable you to reach Porto Cruz in twenty-four hours with a fair wind.

" I admit you have got to windward of me in one or two respects, but after all, we number nine men well armed, against three—one of them a deserter—and a boy, with two muskets and little powder or lead."

He paused for a moment as if expecting an answer. Getting none, he went on :

" Those are my terms, and pretty generous

ones at that. Accept them, and we will go our separate ways. Refuse them, and in a day, two days, I'll have ye, and there's no torment of the pit I won't make ye suffer. You will pray for death a thousand times before I've finished."

"Is that all?" said John gently.

"Yes!" answered Parry.

"Then hear me!" said John.

"If you badly want the case, which you stole yourself, I reckon, and cut throats for, and the cutter, why, Cap'n Parry, by all means come and fetch 'em.

"We don't want the dinghy; the cutter suits this crew better, and we'd rather have the case than the doubloons.

"I know where away this island lays, so you can lay out a course and light your pipe with it; and when you're ready, come and see how many muskets we've got.

"You say there's nine of ye. Bah!" cried John, "if there's a swab among ye I couldn't stretch out inside five minutes with these two bare hands, I'd eat my hat."

There came a howl of rage at this from the bushes behind Parry, and not a second too soon John drew back behind the sheltering cliff, for half a dozen bullets spat against the rock.

At the same moment, before I could fire, Parry had sprung back and disappeared among the trees. So quick as a flash Barker and I fired into the smoke that curled up from the bushes.

A hoarse scream of pain followed the reports of the shots, and a man bounded out of the bushes, rolled over, tearing convulsively at the grass for a second or two, and then lay still.

CHAPTER XV

THE ATTACK

"HOORAY! first blood to us. Down, lads!"

Another ragged volley came from the same place, but we were too high up, and all the harm it did was to send a shower of leaves and twigs about our heads.

Re-loading again, I moved up the cliff a few yards and cautiously peeped across, but everything was quiet again, and the pirates well hidden behind the screen of bushes. All that could be seen was the body of the dead pirate lying stark and still on the turf between the bushes and the edge of the cliff.

A soft step rustled on the turf, and looking round I saw John.

"Well done, my lad!" said he. "We're doing grand; they're only two to one now, and they won't try anything on until low water; but stay where ye are. I'm away round the island to see if there's any sign o' the dinghy!" and with a cheery nod he passed on.

Keeping careful watch all along the opposite cliff and picturing the savage faces lurking behind the bushes, I marked the tide slowly rise to the line of seaweed on the rock, telling it was high water, and then begin to go down. Two hours more and they could wade across the sand-bar.

An hour dragged heavily on, and though horribly nervous and frightened with the deadly silence, I thought anything would be better than this sickening suspense, and wished with all my heart they would attack.

Gradually the tide ebbed away and the neck of sand and pebbles became visible, when again I heard a footfall, and John called in a quick, sharp whisper :

" Here, Ned, come down ! "

Hastily I followed him, and when we were come to the open space below the barricade he beckoned on Hood and Barker.

Said John : " It's as I thought, they're going to come at us both ways. The dinghy is coming round this minute. I watched her until she passed the mouth of the channel. There's four men in her, and I expect the others are waiting to rush the passage at the sand-bank !

" They'll make a dash together, that's certain, and if ever ye fought in your lives, fight now ;

die fighting!" he cried fiercely, and his solitary eye blazed beneath the bushy eyebrows.

"A dram o' spirits here, Hood."

Hood brought some brandy, and filling out a dram to each handed it round.

"Now then!" cried John, holding up the shell. "Here's luck to us! Hood, old shipmate, and you, Ned, ye'll man them heads at the cove there, and when the dinghy makes her dash, do what ye can for her. Jim! you and me will take the barricade. All together, lads, and death to every mother's son o' them!"

Dashing the shell on the grass, the fierce old seaman ordered us to our stations.

"I'll take this toothpick along!" said he, drawing the boat-hook out, "and the dirk and butt-end for close quarters!"

We loaded, and divided the arms amongst us, and looked carefully to the flints and priming.

"Here!" said Hood to me, "take the pistol and give me the shot-gun. I'll stand a better chance of hitting something wi' a dozen slugs. You take that side, and I'll man this one, and if between us we don't give that dinghy and her crew one o' the biggest kind o' surprises, call me a tailor!"

Armed with musket and pistol, I climbed to the top of the rock, overlooking the water

twenty feet below, and Hood lay out on the opposite side. But another notion struck him, and leaving the shot-gun on the rock he went down again, and hoisting a lump of rock weighing about a hundredweight on his shoulder, he climbed back and dumped it down on the edge of the rock.

"I hope nothing gets in the way of this 'ere pebble when I heaves it overboard!" said he, with a grin.

"Down, Hood!" I cried, "here they come!" as the dinghy shot round the bend of the island, keeping well out of musket shot.

I made out the short, squat figure of Richards standing up in the stern-sheets eagerly scanning the walls of the little isle. Two men pulled at the oars, while a fourth crouched in the bows, the barrel of his musket glinting in the sun.

Slowly they pulled along, and at length they opened the entrance to the cove. They ceased rowing, and a shout told us they had caught sight of the cutter. Richards put his hand to his mouth, and a shrill whistle echoed across the water, which was instantly answered from the main island.

"Signal number one," said Hood quietly. "Lay low and get ready!"

The dinghy's bows were slewed round, and with gentle strokes they crept warily closer and closer

"Don't waste your shot!" said Hood, seeing me squinting along the barrel; "wait till they're close in, lad!"

Suddenly, when they were almost within range, Richards's hand went up again, and once more the shrill whistle cut the air. Again it was answered, followed a second later by a volley of musket shots.

"Give way, bullies, with a will!" roared the gunner.

The oars fell with a splash, and fast under the furious pulling the dinghy raced towards us.

"Steady, Ned, lad, and don't shoot Richards; leave him to me!" snarled Hood.

Steady enough I was now they were on us, though I shivered a moment before at the whistle, and with a prayer in my heart covered my man.

One of the rowers, the bowman he was, and I remember the mark I aimed for was the corner of the red neckerchief he wore that hung between his shoulder-blades.

The boat was only thirty yards away when I fired.

Half rising from his seat, he dropped his oar and fell limply back.

Richards and the man in the bows fired at the report, but the motion of the boat spoiled their aim, and one bullet smacked against the rock below me, while the other droned overhead like a great bumble-bee.

Dropping his musket with an oath, Richards sprang to the dead man's oar and pulled the bows straight for us again.

"Pull, ye devil!" he cried, fiercely rowing with his face towards us.

The dinghy was almost between the cliffs, when up rose the mighty form of Hood with the rock poised above his head.

"Backwater!" screamed Richards.

But too late. The great rock hurtled through the air, crushing the bowman's head like a shell and tearing a great hole in the side of the boat, through which the water poured in a torrent.

I fired the pistol at the other rower, but missed him, for he didn't stop pulling, and in a minute the half-sunk dinghy grounded on the sandy bottom.

Hood levelled the shot-gun and pulled the trigger, but the weapon missed fire.

"Out wi' ye, and at that whelp up there!" shouted Richards, as cutlass in hand he sprang into the water.

But Hood, swinging the shot-gun by the barrel,

The dinghy was almost between the cliffs when up rose the mighty form of Hood with the rock poised above his head (*page* 234)

whirled it with awful force at the pirate as he clambered after Richards. The heavy brass-shot butt struck him full on the temple, felling him like a pithed bullock. Seeing this, the gunner floundered ashore alone, and Hood strode down to meet him.

But while the day had gone so well with us at the cove, that was not the story of Anderson and Barker at the barricade. A deadly struggle waged there.

At the second whistle, which brought the dinghy down on Hood and me, Parry and Becke had made a dash across the sand-bar, and, covered by a continuous musket fire kept up by the two remaining pirates, scaled the cliff without Anderson or Barker being able to oppose them, and, waiting there until joined by the other two, rushed in a body upon the barricade, yelling like fiends and firing their pistols as they came.

A fierce drive of the boat-hook stopped the rush of one pirate for ever, and letting go his uncouth lance John caught up his musket and dashed Becke's brains out as he strove to climb the barricade.

Parry reached over the barricade and aimed a venomous cut at the head of the grim old carpenter which, had it taken effect, this story

would never have been written, but the stroke was broken by the remaining pirate, Peach, who at that moment staggered against the captain in avoiding a furious thrust from Barker's cutlass.

As it was, Anderson reeled back, stunned for a moment by the half-spent blow. Peach had clambered over and engaged Barker, who fought the big pirate like a raving madman ; and Parry, with a shrill yell of triumph, sprang to the top of the barricade.

Pausing there an instant to hurl an empty pistol at Anderson, he leapt down upon him like a tiger.

The shock brought them both to the earth, and down the slope they rolled locked in each other's arms, tugging, writhing, and twisting, gasping and panting with terrific exertion as they strove with deadly might and main to throttle one another.

Now Parry was uppermost, trying to wrench his arm free to get at his knife, now John ; and as I ran up hurriedly re-loading the pistol I saw with horror the old man's face all red with blood. That nerved and maddened me as I danced round them with the pistol cocked watching for an opening.

Anderson, I could see, was growing weak from

loss of blood, and the younger man was slowly but surely wearing him down.

Too intent upon their battle to notice me, I twice raised the pistol to fire at the pirate, but so quick did they roll and twist about each other that I lowered my hand and drew back, fearful of shooting John.

But the struggle was too fast and furious to last, and Parry, tearing himself free with one superhuman effort, clutched John by the throat, and in a twinkling was astride his chest pinning him down.

The pirate swept the hair from his face, and plucking his knife from the sheath raised it aloft. My chance came at that instant, and before he could strike I dashed in, and clapping the muzzle of the pistol to his back pulled the trigger.

The tense muscles slackened, a torrent of blood gushed from his mouth, the knife fell in a weak futile blow, which John easily turned aside, and Captain Parry's black soul had gone to its reckoning.

John staggered to his feet, swaying like a drunken man, and passing his hand over his brow demanded thickly :

" How goes the day with us, boy ? "

Before I could answer, Hood came running up

with a bloody cutlass in his hand, and, looking at the dead pirate, cried fiercely:

"Where's the mate?"

"Becke?" said John. "I stove his head in at the barricade when they rushed it. Ye'll find him laying there alongside o' Rudd!"

"He is, and here's Cap'n Parry!" said Hood, turning the body over with his foot.

"Then, mates, I'll tell you what!" he cried. "By the living Jingo, we've swept the decks! For gunner Richards and his boat's crew are all stiff uns, every man-jack!"

"Barker's gone, though, poor lad. Peach downed him before I was through with the gunner—but Peach ain't crowing about it."

And so it was, from first to last, scarce half an hour had gone by since we heard the first whistle, and of all the schooner's crew, we three were all that were left alive.

Here lay the captain, stiff and stark, his dead eyes staring up at the blue sky. Yonder, by the water's edge, sprawled the gunner, where Hood had flung him after choking his ugly life out. Barker had met his death at the hands of Peach, beside him was stretched the big pirate; behind the barrier lay Becke and Rudd—all dead.

The bright morning sun streamed down on

this picture of death, an unnatural stillness filled the cove, for all the birds had fled, and naught was heard but the faint ripple and tinkle of water on the tiny beach below and our own deep breathing.

CHAPTER XVI

WE SAIL FROM THE ISLAND

FINALLY said John, "Pass along a drop o' grog, Hood. I'm all aback along o' this wipe over the skull, an' mebbe one o' ye'll tie it up with a bit o' rag."

"Here, Ned," said Hood, giving me some brandy, "take a good sup o' this 'ere; it'll hearten ye up, my lad. No wonder ye're white and sick-looking round the gills."

I felt horribly sick, so I drank the strong spirit, and then I went and filled my hat with fair cool water that bubbled from beneath a rock among the trees.

Coming back with this, I bathed and cleansed the wound in John's head, and bound it up with my neckerchief.

We carried Barker's body to the trees and laid him in a shallow grave we scooped out with the cutlasses and an oar beneath a great tree. Poor

Barker, he was our only regret, and I remember with awe his presentiment of the night before He knew he was *fey*, as they say in the Highlands.

That done, we left the others for the birds to pick, and with one final glance at the gruesome scene, ran the cutter afloat and pulled out to sea.

A light air was blowing from the west, so John and Hood took the oars until we rounded the south-west corner of the little isle. There, the wind being fair, we hoisted the lug and ran down to the pirates' camping-ground.

Here was abundant evidence of how busy the freebooters had been, for not only had they landed all the chests of money, but most of the schooner's store of provisions and arms, a great lot of powder and lead, the chest of carpenter's tools, and a heap of gear in the shape of spare sails, spars, and cordage, besides enough rum to have kept them all drunk for a year. The whole beach around was strewn with casks they had floated and towed ashore.

While Hood lit a fire and cooked some food, John and I rummaged among the stores.

"Where did Cap'n Parry keep his charts

and navigating gear—d'ye know?" said John, pausing in his search for a moment.

"The charts were kept in a long black tin case," I replied, "and the instruments in a locker."

"Look about ye then, Ned," said John. "I'd give one o' them boxes o' doubloons for his chart o' these seas. Ye might be able to find where away we are, you that has book learning and can write an' figure."

We tumbled the things about and searched high and low, but never a sign of the chart-case, and at last we gave it up.

"It's not very likely he would leave them on the wreck," said John, "but we'll pull out and see."

Telling Hood what we were going to search for, we rowed out to the wreck and climbed aboard by some gear that trailed over the side.

The first thing that met our eyes on gaining the deck was the swollen, putrifying bodies of three pirates.

"Faugh!" said Anderson, spitting violently and regarding the corpses. "See, they got knifed in the fight to get into the cutter.

"Shiver my timbers, if they had only come

ashore, think o' that, Ned, and thank your stars. That's Carey, the red-haired man, one of the boldest, bloodiest villains among them!"

Every hole and corner of the dismantled cabin we rifled, but the search proved fruitless. Returning on deck, we heard a shout from the beach, and turning to look, we saw Hood waving something above his head.

"Come on, Hood has found it," said Anderson.

"This is wot you're looking for, ain't it?" said he, as we came ashore. "I found un back there among the bushes along wi' his chest and toggery!"

"Yes," said I, "that's the chart-case, and here's the instruments!"

Pulling the charts out, I soon found the one we required, and spread it open on the sand.

Often had I watched Captain Paterson marking out the schooner's run from noon to noon, as I worked in the cabin, and had little difficulty in finding our present position on this one, for Parry had marked it all out. A star marked the spot where we took the "Castellan de la Plana," and a long line ending at a little black speck showed

our drive before the hurricane and the island. Almost due south lay the Dutch island of Curaçao, and measuring with a piece of thread on the scale in the corner of the chart I found it to be distant about seventy miles.

When I had explained this, said Hood :

" Right you are, my lad, and it's a fine thing to be a scholar, as I know wot can only make a cross for my name ; and if Curaçao is only seventy mile away, the rest is dead easy. We can fetch it with anything decent in the shape of a breeze between daylight and dark. It's not easy to miss, by reason of its standing so high. And Porto Cruz—John and I know it like the inside o' our hats."

After supper Hood produced a bottle of wine, and, filling our pipes, we lay under the trees and talked far into the night of our plans for the future.

Indeed, now that the treasure was ours, we were hard put to it to know what to do. A score of plans were talked over and rejected. At last it was agreed we should bury the treasure, and on reaching Porto Cruz buy a small schooner, in which we could return to the island, pick it up, and sail home.

Sunrise next morning found us up and busy

over our preparations for leaving the island. The first thing we did was to dig a great hole in the sand, but before burying the gold John burst open one of the chests and took out four hundred doubloons; then we covered the boxes up and carefully marked the spot, smoothing it down and throwing the sand about.

The cutter had to be overhauled and provisioned with good store of dried meat, biscuit, and fruit, for thirst was what we most dreaded, should we encounter head winds.

All these matters kept us employed till sundown, and we went to sleep that night intending to start with the dawn, should the wind be fair.

Morning came, however, with a wind that blew straight in our teeth, and so for three days we were stayed in the most vexatious manner, either by contrary winds or none at all.

But all things come to an end sooner or later, and the fourth day broke bright and sunny, with a merry breeze from the north-east that flecked the blue sea with fleecy wave-crests.

We took our last meal on the island, and running the cutter into the sea, the lug was hoisted and we bore away for the south. The wind held fair, and before night we were coasting westward

and southward along the shores of Curaçao, and the following night we ate our supper in a snug, unfrequented tavern in Porto Cruz, having accomplished the voyage without mishap.

Holding no converse with any man, we lay quiet at this tavern, and a day or two later fortune threw us across the path of one Captain MacColl, master-mariner of the schooner " Morning Star," homeward bound to Greenock in coffee, sugar, and spices.

MacColl was a grizzly-haired, hard-featured Scot, crabbed in temper, and this last had not been improved by being delayed in Porto Cruz for three weeks by the death of four of the schooner's crew from Yellow Jack, and the refusal of the remainder to put to sea short-handed.

Hood made an appointment for him to meet us at the tavern where we lodged, and on his arrival pipes and glasses were set forth, over which our proposals were laid before him.

He was to ship us as seamen, touch at a certain island—latitude and longitude to be given when the schooner was at sea—there pick up certain property of ours, and land us at or near Inverness. Also, he was to ship no more hands, we agreeing to work under him in sailing the schooner home;

and when John finished by slapping down a hundred doubloons in payment for the same, MacColl's face broke into a broad smile like the sun coming out from behind a cloud.

All was now arranged to everybody's satisfaction, and the schooner being ready for sea, we paid our tavern score and accompanied Captain MacColl on board.

The "Morning Star" was a stout little flying topgallant sail schooner, and easy to handle, though we would find ourselves with plenty to do if it came on dirty weather on the voyage across the North Atlantic. The crew, including we three, only numbered eight all told, but short-handed or not, we had resolved to steer clear of being out-numbered and robbed as far as possible.

We raised the island that evening, but stood off and on all night, as the captain—who knew it well—told us that passing craft gave it a wide berth owing to the shallow sea and shifting sand-banks around. We might have been there for years without sighting a ship.

When daylight came we stood in as near as soundings would permit, and then hove to.

An hour or two sufficed to unearth the chests. Once more the schooner's sails were trimmed to

the breeze, and by noon I had watched with John and Hood the fateful island fade into a tiny smudge, and finally sink below the rim of the sea far astern.

CHAPTER XVII

HOW WE CAME HOME

I CAME on deck one cold grey morning, late in December, to find the " Morning Star " heading due east. A keen bitter nor'-westerly breeze was blowing, that made the schooner tumble and pitch among the grey-green surges, and at intervals showers of snow and sleet drove down the wind, chilling one to the very marrow.

Away to the south, a dark dim coastline loomed up through the wintry weather.

" Where away are we now ? " I called to John, who stood by the tiller with the snow clinging to his eyebrows. " What land is that ? "

His eye twinkled as he braced himself against the straining tiller.

" That'll be Cape Wrath, I'm thinking ! " said he. " And we're booming along now for the Pentland Firth. Another two days o' this breezy, lad, and you will eat your New Year's dinner wi' your mother."

So here, thought I, we are home again, and all

the storm and danger lay like some wild fantastic dream far behind.

There was a tang of home in the whistling wind; the very waves had a welcome swish in them as we plunged and surged along over their heaving breasts, and yonder a "scarff" rose out of the sea, and squattered ahead over the wave-tops as if off to tell we were coming.

All that day I hardly left the deck except to snatch a bite of food, and by night we were off Dunnet Head climbing the monstrous seas of a flood-tide in the throat of the Pentland.

Not until we had weathered Duncansbay Head, and saw the schooner's nose pointing south, did I go below, and then only on John's warning, that there would be plenty of hard work and little sleep the following night if the breeze held good.

You may be sure I did not require calling twice the next morning; and when I put my head over the companion hatch found dame Fortune still favouring us. The wind had gone down a little, but better than all for our purpose, the sky hung low, a uniform dull grey colour, with every prospect of snow before night.

About noon we rose Tarbet Ness, but as we had no intention of running past Chanonry in daylight to be boarded by coast watchers, we shortened sail.

Creeping slowly on and keeping out of sight of land, we waited for night to fall.

The sea was empty save for one solitary herring boat scurrying along like some big frightened sea-bird to get inside the "Suters" before the storm broke.

Night and the snow came on together; so, hoisting the topgallant sail again, we held on, and when—through the gathering darkness and driving snow—we saw the twinkling lights of the cottages of Rosemarkie, I took the tiller, knowing the channel now like the palm of my hand.

Like a phantom we glided past the flaring beacon on Chanonry Point, and keeping her well in, we swept along past Avoch and Munlochy. Another short reach across from Kilmuir, and I brought her up all standing off Longman's Point.

Long and carefully we had planned how the treasure was to be landed and stowed away in safety; and it was only after weighing and deliberating on a hundred schemes we at length decided to adopt the plan we were now to put into practice. It had need be a good plan, for what with the unrest in the Highlands, the land swarmed with spies.

Losing no time, we quickly launched the

schooner's two boats, and leaving John to get the treasure on deck, Hood and I, with a seaman, took the smallest boat and pulled ashore.

Telling Hood I would be back within the hour, I sped away, taking all the well-remembered short cuts until I gained the end of the road.

The heavy snowfall now lay an inch deep on the road already, and I chuckled to think the cart would make no more noise than a wraith.

Ten minutes more, and I was knocking impatiently at my mother's window. At length there came the sound of some person moving within.

"Up!" I cried, "and open the door, mother, it's Ned!"

There was a scream, the chain rattled as the door was flung open, and next moment I was hugging mother and sister Peggie, who—half laughing and crying between hugs and kisses—plied me larboard and starboard with a raking fire of questions.

In a few hurried sentences I asked them to leave questions for afterwards, and help me to get the pony harnessed; and while we were doing that I told them what was to be done before daylight.

There was no more surprised animal in all the land that night than our old pony, as I sent

him helter-skelter down the road in the wildest gallop on the most important errand he was ever on, or likely to be.

Drawing up on the point, I tied him up to the bushes and flashed the lantern I had taken the precaution to bring along.

A whistle from Hood, and an answering flash from the schooner, told me they were on the alert, and a few minutes later the two boats grated on the beach with their precious cargoes.

The chests were heavy and the cart was light, so rather than risk a breakdown we decided to make two journeys of it. So loading up with what the boats had brought ashore, they pulled back for the remainder, while Hood and I, trotting along on either side of the pony, urged him up the road.

The snow continued to fall and the night was inky dark, save for the ghostly whiteness on the snow-covered road, and we moved along noiselessly, only for the muffled beat of the pony's hoofs in the snow.

There was a blazing fire awaiting us when we arrived. Hastily I introduced Hood, and having unloaded our first cargo we drained a glass of steaming grog each, and slipping a flask of old brandy into my pocket, away we raced for the second.

John had them lying on the beach and was seated atop of them in company with MacColl who had come ashore to bid us good-bye. I passed the flask round, and giving him God-speed we stood on the beach as he pushed off, and watched the last link that bound us to the far-distant Indies disappear in the whirling snow and gloom.

Then loading up the cart once more, we turned our faces homeward. Before another hour was sped the treasure was snugly stowed in the cellar beneath our feet, and we were seated round a table laid out with such a spread of good cheer as made Hood's face beam with huge content; and with many a scream and half-startled glance at the old sea carpenter's terrible face from mother and Peg, I told them the story of our adventures.

Our duty was now to find the owners of the treasure. We made long and diligent inquiries in the West Indies and in Cartagena in Spain, where the "Castellan de la Plana's" cargo was consigned.

The barque had been a privately owned trader, but beyond that and the story of her being boarded and sunk by the freebooters we could learn nothing of any owners to either the jewels or the money, so at last we felt sure that

they lay with the barque at the bottom of the sea.

We divided the treasure fairly between us, but neither Hood nor Anderson would have anything to do with the jewels, declaring they had enough and to spare, which indeed was true, for the treasure made us all rich, and you may be sure we did not forget the murdered captain's sister nor the relations of the poor seamen who were so cruelly done to death.

John and Hood made up their minds to settle down in Kilmuir, and accordingly they purchased a cosy little cottage, where they did for themselves, scouring and swabbing the decks and Hood piping the crew for dinner. And they had a smart cutter built, in which they used to cruise about the bay in the fine weather.

The villagers grew to love the old seamen, who were generous as princes in any case of need; and I can tell you it was a sight worth walking a good way to see John sitting on the bench outside his cottage of a summer's evening surrounded by a knot of fisher boys and girls and little children all staring earnestly on the grim scarred face, listening to some tale of far-off lands across the sea.

And on long winter nights, when the wild north gales came screaming down the bay,

lashing it into a sheet of foam and sending the spray flying over the rocks against the cottage windows, the big kitchen of the "Citadel" would be crowded with greybeards, staid, middle-aged men, and young bloods, and an alarming amount of grog and tobacco consumed over the tales John would be drawn into telling—of battle, storm, and shipwreck. But the best tale, and that he never told, was how we sailed and fought with Captain Parry and his men far across the western seas along the Spanish Main.

THE END

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS

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THE DECOY DUCK. By a PEER, Author of "The Hard Way," "The Ordeal of Silence," etc.

The novels by a Peer are among the successes of the land by right of merit, and owe nothing to the adventitious position of the author. They are, of course, addressed to men and women of intelligence and experience, and this the latest example follows closely upon the design of its predecessors in that respect. It is a story in which none of the characters are eccentrics, or either too desperately good or too desperately wicked. Its conclusion leaves the reader well satisfied with human nature and with the world in general.

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Not so long ago the town was shaking with suppressed laughter over a very brilliant work of imaginative fiction entitled "The Storm of London," published by Mr. John Long. Anything more unlike the regulation novel it would be difficult to conceive. It embodied an excruciating idea in daring and diverting fashion. "Stephen Ormond" is modern in every line of it. It deals with a question about which there must be differences of opinion, and which the individual must settle for himself. It is a story of deep feeling and deep interest, scintillating with wit, observation, knowledge of life, insight, and human sympathy.

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

LEVITY HICKS. By Tom Gallon, Author of "The Great Gay Road," "Memory Corner," etc.

John Leviticus Hicks is a man who has never had his chance. Others have made use of him, and shielded themselves behind him; love has been denied him, and snatched from him; he has been Fortune's football. Hicks dies, and after an interval comes back. He moves among the scenes he knew in life; the fact that he has come back is recognised—wholly without fear—by two persons only. The one, a woman, by reason of her deep, abiding love for him; the other, a child, by reason of the fact that in life she had placed him in utterly fanciful surroundings—as in a fairy story. The ending is a happy one. The dead man is able to influence matters after all, and he fades out of the story, taking with him the soul of the man who had worked all things for evil.

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

CATCHING A CORONET. By EDMUND BOSANQUET, Author of "A Society Mother," "The Woman Between."

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

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SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

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A GIRL OF NO IMPORTANCE. By OLIVIA RAMSEY, Author of "The Other Wife," "Two Men and a Governess," etc.

This really fascinating story depicts some love episodes in the life of a young Peer of the Realm, the scenes being laid alternately in London and in the heart of the country. Everard is a character whose somewhat reckless career will be followed with thrilling interest. Even the hardened novel reader will be surprised at the *dénouement*, which is well screened. It is an entirely delightful piece of writing, palpitating with human passion.

SEEKERS EVERY ONE. By BEATRICE KELSTON, Author of "A Three-Cornered Duel."

The story of a girl who grows up eager to find some reason for life and living, and discovers that the whole world is bent more or less upon the same quest. Some are easily satisfied; others like herself are ever spurred on to further search. She first seeks happiness as she conceives it, and fails of her desire. After a disastrous love affair, she seeks distraction on the Stage. Her experiences there, and the wider outlook they teach her, bring her back at last to where her true happiness lies.

A SPARK ON STEEL. By E. SCOTT GILLIES, Author of "The Shadow of the Guillotine."

"A Spark on Steel" is the story of the love of a Prussian officer for a daughter of France in the dark days of 1870. He has to choose between love of the girl and love of country. He chooses the latter, and the story develops rapidly, until the lover finds the key to the solution of his difficulty. France claims her, the new-born unity of Germany claims him, but after the grosser existence comes the joy that lives beyond the Gates of Death.

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

THE LURE OF CROONING WATER. By MARION HILL, Author of "The Pettison Twins," "Harmony Hall," etc.

The heroine, Georgette Verlaine, is an actress: more—she is a charming, fascinating, irresistible young woman, alive to her very finger-tips. It is a full, strong novel: tragic in parts, yet always human, and with a touch of quiet humour which adds its own peculiar relish to the story. The author has drawn her characters with rare sympathy and tenderness. The book is so spontaneous and genuine in its humour as to afford its readers a delightful experience which they will want to go through again by further perusal.

THE SLEEPING VILLAGE. By JULIA NEVILLE, a new Author.

Neither monotony nor artificiality can be charged against "The Sleeping Village." The setting of the story is rural Russia as it is to-day, and very pretty is the picture which the authoress paints, from intimate knowledge, of the country and the country people. The characters and situations are all drawn from real life, so that the story is not fiction, but rather idealised fact. It aims simply at expression, and by artlessness conceals art. Therein lies its charm. The reader really lives in the sleeping village, and he feels braced by his acquaintance with its intensely human and lovable inhabitants, so little known and so ill known by the Western world.

UNQUENCHED FIRE. By ALICE GERSTENBERG, a new Author.

This is the first Novel by Alice Gerstenberg, an author of definite promise. Apart from its power as a story of the most absorbing interest, "Unquenched Fire" is rich in details of an intimate study of the struggles of an impulsive girl, with a talent for amateur theatricals, to become a real actress, of vivid pictures of life behind the scenes in the theatre, and of the development of the character of a versatile and very charming woman.

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

LOVE ON SMOKY RIVER. By THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS, Author of "The Toll of the Tide," &c.

This is a novel with the wild Far West for its setting. It tells how a man fought and conquered Nature and—what was of greater consequence—fought and conquered himself. "Love on Smoky River" is a book to fire the imagination and stir the blood. Tragedy stalks through its pages, but Love, in the person of sweet Dorothy Gordon, triumphs in the end. It is a book to make women weep tears of joy and strong men hold themselves tense, so that they sigh with relief when the end is reached, only to take up the book again that they may enjoy anew its stimulus and power.

BEYOND THE HILLS. By MAIBEY WHITTINGTON, a new Author.

This is a dramatic story in which the chief scenes are laid on Dartmoor. The heroine, a daughter of a country squire, has inherited from him a dissatisfied and restless disposition, and she finds life on her mother's farm and the devotion of her rough country lover wearisome and unsatisfying. The story tells in a vivid and exciting manner the tragedy which her longing to see life beyond her native hills brings forth. The scenery of the moor and the atmosphere of the life there are most realistically depicted.

TWO CAN PLAY. By HORACE MUSPRATT, a new Author.

Though the main situation is connected with a Turf sensation, the author has evaded solely depicting a series of racing scenes. Plot and a counter-plot are capably interwoven, and the characters clearly drawn. The infatuation of Mrs. Macaulay, a mysterious widow, for Mander, the hero, is the cause of a weird catastrophe to the starter, to which incident may be attributed Ina's—the intended victim—good luck. The bank clerk, Grieg, finds that friends in need are rare, and that matrimony may lead to strange discoveries.

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

A SOUL IN SHADOW. By ELSÉ CARRIER, a new Author.

Miss Carrier's novel reveals much originality of thought linked with uncommon powers of expression. The tragedy centres round a well-known district in Northumberland. The hero, Sir Philip Gray, is a young Englishman whose careless good nature has involved him in a *mésalliance* which darkens his life, and whose efforts to emerge from which lead him into actual crime. The latter part of the book is devoted to the clearing up of the mysteries, and shows how by atonement, and through mental suffering bordering on insanity, he wins his way back to peace and social dignity.

A PAGE IN A MAN'S HISTORY. By PENELOPE FORD, a new Author.

As a revelation of a unique woman's temperament and a very close study of several phases of her life, this novel has unquestionably real claims on readers who care for the study of human nature. Peggy's adventures in South Africa, where she first encounters Dorrien, her transit to England, where she provokes her conventional mother, and the drama of her attachment for Paul Armstrong, the impoverished politician, make capital reading. The strange complications which ensue in the last part of the story comprise a very original episode.

THE MAN IN THE CAR. By ALAN RALEIGH, a new Author.

Readers of fiction of all tastes and temperaments appreciate a first-rate sensational mystery. Such is the description which best applies to this novel. Its component parts are a financier and his double, a conspiracy to defeat justice, and an intermixture of love and jealousy, intrigue and blackmail. The author writes in plain, unvarnished fashion, and marshals his plot with adroit strategy. Thus the reader is caught in the first pages and galloped along at break-neck speed. There are moments in fact when he must needs hold his breath and hold on to his chair, the excitement waxes so fast and furious. Finally the secret is revealed in a manner which is unique in the annals of fiction. "The Man in the Car" has in it all the makings of a popular success.

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

THE LIGHT-BEARERS. By M. SYLVESTRE, Author of "Valencia Varelst."

There have been many books attempting to deal with the great Social Evil of to-day, but none have approached the subject in so masterly, so virile, and so conscientious a manner as M. Sylvestre in this novel, "The Light-Bearers." The recent agitation in regard to the White Slave Traffic has stirred public opinion to its depths, and yet it is safe to say that while men and women have been moved to an intense and righteous indignation by the revelation of the horrors of the traffic, few really understand the depths to which the victims descend, or realise the subtlety and craft exercised or the power wielded by those who make it their business to barter in flesh and sully the purity of womanhood. Adequately to picture these things requires an author who while animated by intense conscientiousness of motive yet possesses the rare quality of restraint and judgment. These qualities M. Sylvestre possesses to a remarkable degree—to a degree indeed amounting to positive genius—and the consequence is that "The Light-Bearers" stands alone in its fearless strength and tremendous power.

MARY IN THE MARKET. By H. MAXWELL, Author of "Sir Roger Keyne," "Mrs. Trevor Tressingham," etc.

Misconstruction of Motives, with all the humours and pathos it brings in its train, is one of the most human of themes. Who of us has not suffered from such "misconstruction" at some time or other? And the Mary of this book suffered more than most. Mary, with her lofty ideals, her independence of spirit, her common-sense and her *naïveté*, her vivid sense of humour, her mingled scorn of and regard for appearances, her splendid strength of character and her delightful weaknesses, her modernity and her old-fashionedness, all portrayed in an atmosphere of pleasantly exciting adventure, is certainly the best creation Mr. H. Maxwell has yet given us, and one which in our view is as new in the world of fiction as it is charming.

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

THE IMPENITENT PRAYER. By Amy J. Baker, Author of "I Too Have Known."

As she did in her first novel, "I Too Have Known," which was one of the successes of the Autumn season of 1911, Amy J. Baker (Mrs. Maynard Crawford) has again, and with great effect, taken South Africa as the background of this her new book, wherein we are once more face to face with the magical charm of the sub-continent. The key-note of the novel may be found in the following quotation from the text:—"When a man offers South Africa his youth, she demands the service of his manhood." Lyn Baring, the heroine, is first wooed and then thrown aside by Stanley Fraser, the wealthy mine-owner. The effect of this upon her character is subtly traced by the author, who endows her men and women with all the joy and sorrow, goodness and badness which belong to ordinary human beings.

FRESH AIR. By Harry Temple, a new Author.

This novel describes typical suburban society of the day: the contending social ambitions and rivalries urging to a race for wealth which leads to stirring incidents, and involves some of the characters in disaster. There is, in contrast to this, the strong reaction towards the Simple Life and the healthy influence of the world of nature and the fresh air

THE LITTLE MAISTER. By R. H. Forster, Author of "Midsummer Morn," etc.

Of the living writers of historical fiction Mr. R. H. Forster occupies a position of "splendid isolation." To find his equal in knowledge and in capacity for portraying the past in all its pageantry we must go back to the period of Walter Scott. Mr. Forster has done for Northumbria what Mr. Hardy did for Wessex and Mr. Blackmore for Devonshire.

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

HOBSON'S CHOICE. By G. G. CHATTERTON, Author of "The Girl With the Odds Against Her," etc.

The author depicts with pathos, yet with abundant humour, the vicissitudes of the daughters of a country family who, born in the purple, lose their luxury and position. The manner in which each bears her reverse is well and forcibly contrasted. But it is around the life of the youngest sister that the power and passion of the novel concentrates itself. Tempted beyond her powers of resistance, in a scene of great stress and emotion she agrees to go under, yet later pulls herself together, and the end of the story leaves her triumphantly happy.

LOVE'S SENTINEL. By FLORENCE WARDEN, Author of "The Bad Lord Lockington," etc.

The plot of this very human and moving story is original and its execution masterly. Marriot Carr, the long-suffering heroine, will win all hearts. The ingenious way in which involuntary bigamy, involving a vicar, a man of mark and of high honour, brings about the most astounding complications is in itself a masterpiece of construction. Madeline, the selfish widow and butterfly wife, is drawn to the very life. In many places there is true pathos and intense passion. Lady Katherine and her vulgarian son are delightful comedy.

INCOMPARABLE JOAN. By ALICE M. DIEHL, Author of "Isola," etc.

From the opening, when we find the worthless, unscrupulous Stanley Pole with his secretary, John Hammond, this narrative grips attention. With the latter stepping so strangely into the shoes of the former and succeeding to the Peerage, one sensation is followed by another. John Hammond finds that he has to take on himself the dreadful consequences of the wickedness of the young reprobate into whose place he has come. Incident succeeds incident, and interest is well sustained throughout. But working in and out through all the vicissitudes of a complicated plot, involving many well-drawn characters, the devoted, beautiful love of Joan shines out star-like, and in the issue redeems the hero, bringing a thrilling narrative to a triumphant close. This story is indeed the apotheosis of a true woman's impassioned love.

SIX SHILLING NOVELS—*continued*

THE BARTENSTEIN CASE. By J. S. FLETCHER, Author of "The Fine Air of Morning," etc.

In "The Bartenstein Case" Mr. J. S. Fletcher has written one of those highly ingenious detective mysteries in which he has made a reputation in serial fiction. He here deals with the mystery attaching to a certain sword-stick which had been in a family of rank for many generations. A murder, in which this sword-stick plays a part, is skilfully unravelled by a Scotland Yard man after many wonderful adventures and by-issues. A Jew millionaire, a young officer in the Army, a charming girl, and a young man about town who prides himself on his skill as an amateur detective figure largely in the book, in which also appears a striking character known as "Grandfather Punctuality," who has been added to his list of characters for stage production by Mr. Bransby Williams.

THE PURPOSE: Reflections and Digressions. By HUBERT WALES, Author of "The Spinster," "Mr. and Mrs. Villiers," etc. Crown 8vo. Price 5*s.* net. With Portrait of Author in photogravure.

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